

# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

SOUTHEAST ASIA

DECEMBER 2019



## BEST OF 2019

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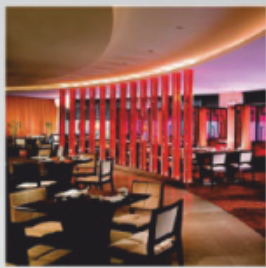
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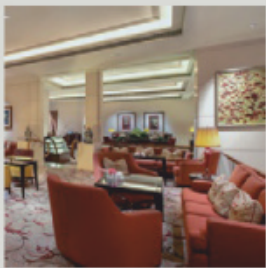
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Pool at The  
Outpost Hotel  
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### THE BARRACKS HOTEL SENTOSA

One of our favorite things about Singapore is the way the past so elegantly mingles with the present, with history always informing the future. Originally built as a military outpost in 1904, The Barracks Hotel is a transportive, serene property that has been painstakingly restored to ensure that the historic trappings of luxury travel of a bygone era blend seamlessly with the most modern of conveniences. There are only 40 rooms and suites—the ones at ground level with direct access to the pool—nestled within this intimate cluster of heritage buildings, meaning romance pervades every facet of life here. After you've taken your complimentary heritage tour, retire to The Living Room, where all-day refreshments and evening cocktails are at the ready, with anything you can't find an easy personalized request away, thanks to the exclusive Equerry service. It's an island idyll that fantastically defines a sense of time and a sense of place.

THE BARRACKS  
HOTEL  
SENTOSA

### THE OUTPOST HOTEL SENTOSA

How refreshing! An adults-only hotel with killer views, a dedication to sustainability and a complimentary customized minibar. The rooftop F&B amps up the exclusivity.

### VILLAGE HOTEL SENTOSA

It does indeed take a village: the focus is on the little ones at this family-centered hotel with lazy river, poolside movies, child-size amenities and check-in desk for the kids.

THE OUTPOST  
HOTEL  
SENTOSA

village  
HOTEL SENTOSA



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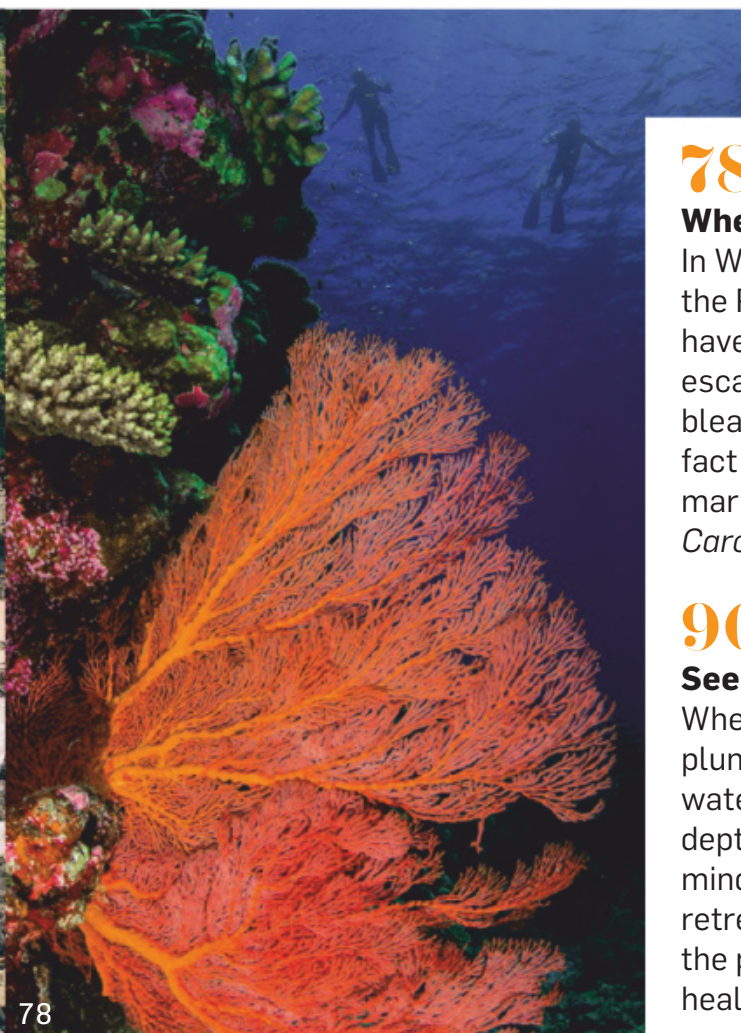




# December features



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**78**  
**Where Coral is King**  
In Western Australia, the Rowley Shoals have managed to escape coral bleaching, and are in fact thriving, writes marine biologist *Carolyn Beasley*.

**90**  
**Seeking Sanctuary**  
Whether you want to plunge into sanctified waters or just the depths of your own mind, Asia's wellness retreats are awash in the philosophy of self-healing.



104 90



**104**  
**All Eyes on D.C.**  
Food, drink and hotels in the American capital have gotten so much cooler so quickly that you need to visit now. *By Lillian Li. Photographed by Mackenzie Stroh*

**112**  
**Spellbound West**  
Africa's São Tomé and Príncipe ensnares the visitor, with unspoiled beauty and memories of a colonial past. *By Sophy Roberts. Photographed by Robbie Lawrence*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ROBBIE LAWRENCE; COURTESY OF TRUE NORTH; LEIGH GRIFFITHS; MACKENZIE STROH

## ON THE COVER

Kicking back and looking forward to a new year at Café del Mar, part of our look at the Best of 2019.



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**24 One With Nature** Set in old forest amid history-laden north Kyoto, a new Aman wants you to do little more than wander, contemplate and explore both

its own vast grounds and the neighborhood it calls home.

**41 The Tattooed Tour Guides** Carving out a new life in Cambodia, a group of deported refugees brings a deeper resonance to local tours.

**44 Taipei's Food Scene Heats Up** With a group of young, wildly creative chefs leading the way, the Taiwanese capital is emerging as Asia's buzziest culinary destination.

**48 Common Ground** A funky crop of co-living spaces, including the new lyf Funan in Singapore, is transforming how millennials travel in Asia.

**Special**

**57 Best of 2019** Standouts from the past 12 months in upscale travel across the region: eye-pleasing new drinking and dining dens; classy refurbbs; hip urban stays; and more.



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FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF LYF FUNAN; RON GLUCKMAN; SEAN MARC LEE; CHRISTOPHER KUCWAY



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## LOOKOUT

A stay at Singapore's Capitol Kempinski; the hotel that's helping save Langkawi's sea cucumbers; taking a dip at Hoshinoya's newest resort in Taiwan's hot-spring hub; the latest travel deals; and much more.

[travelandleisureasia.com](http://travelandleisureasia.com)

### THIS MONTH ON TRAVELANDLEISUREASIA.COM

#### WHAT'S IT LIKE TO EAT AT SINGAPORE'S S\$450-A-HEAD RESTAURANT?

The newly opened Zén easily tops the list of most expensive restaurants in Singapore. We see if it's worth the hype.

#### BORACAY'S GREEN COMEBACK

Boracay is back, cleaner and greener than ever. We return to the island to see if it can preserve its soul along with its shores.

#### EXPLORING TIBET'S KHAM REGION

In Kham, everyday life takes on the air of mythology. We find nomadic traditions holding their own against the inflow of modernity.



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1



2



3



4

1

## Grace Ma

WRITER

**"Common Ground"**

Page 48

"Co-living hotels offer stays in efficient and inspiring spaces among people that you'd probably like hanging out with. The new lyf Funan Singapore has funky, generous-sized rooms with en-suite baths and a *Masterchef*-style kitchen that's totally #kitchengoals. Another great brand is Hmlet—I love their designed venues that give a sense of place, especially the latest ones in Singapore, Sydney and Tokyo. They're one of those ahead of the game in going beyond efficient services and amenities to create a sense of community in their buildings."

Instagram: @littlehappyideas.

2

## Ron Gluckman

WRITER

**"The Tattooed Tour Guides"**

Page 41

"I've followed the story of former refugees sent 'back' from the U.S. to Cambodia since the deportations started; it is shameful how America is forsaking its responsibility to these immigrants who grew up there. I always wanted to do more to help, and Zin has found a perfect way of providing employment and engagement. I traveled out to the countryside of Kirorom with them—it was gorgeous, and we all felt uplifted to be in this refreshingly clean alpine region. My guides Jimmy and Looney had a trove of amazing historical nuggets to share."

Instagram: @rongluckman.

3

## Carolyn Beasley

WRITER

**"Where Coral is King"**

Page 78

"The Rowley Shoals is a marine wonderland, a dot in an unpolluted ocean, heaving with life at every level, from the corals to the magnificent sailfish. It's a reef system that has no visible impacts from humans, a rare treasure. Each day aboard *True North*, I set off diving to meet sharks and manta rays and anything else the ocean cared to reveal. There were many incredible experiences, but the best was hearing a humpback whale underwater at night—it was totally surreal. Just knowing they were with me, even though I couldn't see them, made me feel euphoric."

Instagram: @familyecotravel.

4

## Angela Goh

WRITER

**"A River Runs Through It"**

Page 90

"I found my time at Alba Wellness Valley by Fusion, a hot-spring spa about 30 kilometers north of Vietnam's ancient imperial capital of Hue, to be blissful, sublime and restorative. My favorite part of my visit was the early-morning water meditation with guru I Nyoman Yastama. Immersed in the mineral-rich geothermal waters that have been revered by locals for ages, I received a powerful demonstration of how we can benefit from absorbing nature's healing energy. The water's warm embrace engages the sense of touch, elementally reconnecting us with nature and ourselves."



# Natural majesty in the Maldives

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# On our watch

Twenty-twenty is fast approaching, with an events calendar that's already chock-full. Luckily the leap year gives you an extra day for planning. Here are a few blips on our radar:

## The Games

One of the most hotly anticipated events of the year, the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, takes place from July 24 to August 9. If you're in Japan you can buy tickets online; the rest of us will need to go through a travel agent. Opening ceremony ducats—if you can get your hands on any—range from ¥12,000 to ¥300,000, though half of the games' events tickets are priced below ¥8,000.

## Great Goes Global

Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability are some of the driving themes of Expo 2020 Dubai ([expo2020dubai.com](http://expo2020dubai.com)), which opens on October 20 in the UAE capital. Dubbed The World's Greatest Show, this 173-day event will feature exhibitions and innovations from 190 countries. One-day tickets are Dhs120; three-day passes cost Dhs260.

## Racy Singapore

One of Southeast Asia's most electrifying annual events, the Singapore Grand Prix ([singaporegp.sg/en](http://singaporegp.sg/en)) next year takes place from September 18 to 20. While that's still some time away, tickets are already available, with significant discounts for advanced bookings. Right now, general admission tickets start from S\$240.

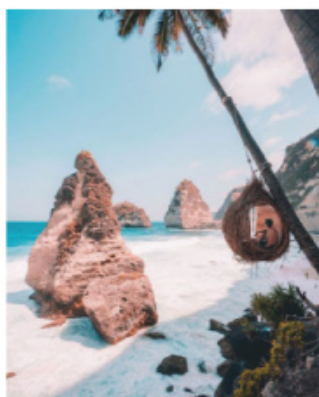


## High Goals

Putting the Himalayas on next year's radar is Visit Nepal 2020 ([welcomenepal.com](http://welcomenepal.com)), a campaign highlighting 100 new destinations that may not ring familiar to your ears. Aiming to attract two million visitors, the nation is keen to emphasize new experiences like jungle safaris in Chitwan and Bhote Koshi river rafting, all the while aiming to boost sustainability and community-based tourism.

## #TLASIA

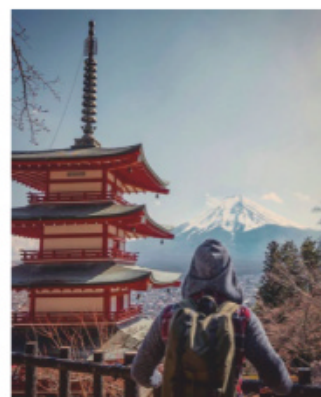
STUNNING SCENES KEEP US ALL GOING UNTIL OUR NEXT BREAK, AS THESE PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS SHOW. WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO NEXT?



Near Bali, Nusa Penida's untouched beach. By @jackbotti.



Colors of Kanchanaburi, Thailand. By @lauralexfly.



"Fujivision." By @seanstumblingthrough.



Mesokanto La Pass, at 5,245 meters in Nepal. @andri\_lutsyk.

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\*The following day



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FROM LEFT: The comfort of a suite at Raffles; the façade remains the same.



# W

**HITTLING DOWN** the most noteworthy openings of the year (“Best of 2019,” page 57) is never an easy task but it’s always a joy to see the strides Asia is making in travel. By way of example, did you know

that Queensland is now hip? In Bali, there’s edible art, while Hong Kong—despite all the turmoil in the city—continues to wow the palate with unheard-of menus and lists of classic drinks. Not to be outdone, Singapore seems to have adopted the idea that it alone can outpour any other destination when it comes to innovative cocktails. You’ll have to be the judge of that one. On to Vietnam, where diverse new hotels—do you prefer artsy or period pieces?—are working hard to draw every type of traveler. As you will see, each of these trends is continuing and expanding into other areas of the region.

For my part, I had a quick chance to see the new Aman Kyoto just as it opened (“One With Nature,” page 24) and came away not only wowed by the serene vibes of the property, but feeling refreshed after just a few days in the crisp Japanese autumn.



Finally, what better way to finish off a year than with an update on the growing wellness scene around Asia (“Seeking Sanctuary,” page 90)? The topic offers an endless number of takes, though as our stories point out it’s best to start with the idea of self-healing. So, breathe—the end of another year is here.

## FROM MY TRAVELS

In Singapore, I had a sneak peek of the refurbished **Raffles** ([raffles.com](http://raffles.com)) with several designers from the firm that tackled the project, Champalimaud Design, on hand. In all, it took six years to strip down and rebuild the icon. As you might imagine, there’s a fine line between preservation and bringing an historic building up to modern standards, but from what I saw, the end result is exactly what you would expect for Singapore’s grande dame. Next time you’re in the Lion City, make sure you see the results for yourself.

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FROM LEFT: IRFAN SAMARDEE; CHRISTOPHER KUCWAY (2)



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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top and a colorful beaded necklace, is smiling broadly and looking towards the right. She is in a crowded setting, likely a conference or trade show, with other people blurred in the background. The overall tone is positive and professional.

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Byron.

no. **1**

## A chic, local-is-best nest in the Byron Bay hinterland.



The iconic crack of a native eastern whipbird reverberates through the surrounding rainforest—the first clue that I've left civilization. Green valleys fold into the landscape, crumpling all the way to the Pacific Ocean, where a full moon prepares to rise above a misty Cape Byron. With my toes dipped in the magnesium infinity pool, my hand clasped around a glass of sparkling wine, it's as if I can reach out and touch the easternmost point of Australia. It's well out of earshot, though. Here in the hinterland outside the buzzy coastal refuge of Byron Bay, the beat of bongos is replaced with the primal hum of nature.

Commanding a hillside above the township of Mullumbimby (Mullum to locals), the boundary-pushing **Blackbird Byron** ([blackbirdbyron.com.au](http://blackbirdbyron.com.au); from A\$445 per night) sets the tone for small-town travel. "We're just on that sweet spot," says owner James Hudson, who built the adults-only bed-and-breakfast with his wife Stella, tapping into their backgrounds in industrial and interior design. "We're far enough away that it feels like a million miles from anything," he says. "But Byron is only 25 minutes away, so if you want to dip your toe in, you can."

Salvaging the corrugated iron and timber from a banana shed that collapsed

on their property, the Hudsons' contemporary "zero-miles materials" retreat is made up of just three pavilions and a communal space overlooking an infinity pool. "We used everything we could from here," Stella says. Glass doors bring the outside in, and design accents of Moroccan tiles and vintage furniture are offset with raw materials like rusted builders' mesh and weathered timber. A launch pad for Mullum's hip cafés, the destination Kiva Spa and the bush trails of Nightcap National Park (part of the UNESCO-listed Gondwana rainforests), Blackbird Byron makes a compelling case for hyper-local travel. —JENNY HEWETT

COURTESY OF BLACKBIRD BYRON



no. 2

## Ethical tours for wildlife lovers.

Sail into Komodo territory, visit retired elephants in Phuket, or try horse whispering in Gurgaon—this assortment of new experiences across Asia provides animal-friendly answers to the call of the wild.



### 1. Jane Goodall-Approved Nature Tours

Travel operator **G Adventures** has added 12 more tours to its Jane Goodall Collection for 2020, two of which traverse spectacular Asian terrain. The “Best of Flores and Komodo” tour (*nine days; from US\$1,549*) wends through the islands of Indonesia’s Komodo National Park, while the “Nepal: Himalaya Highlights” tour (*10 days; from US\$2,079*) treks from tigers in Chitwan National Park to temples in Kathmandu Valley. Both come with the endorsement of primatologist Dr. Goodall, and support the conservation work of the Jane Goodall Institute. [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com).



### 2. Elevated Elephant Experiences

**Phuket Elephant Sanctuary** has launched a wildlife experience that lets you get close-ish to its resident retirees. The “Hands-Off Elephant Experience” (*Bt3,000 per adult, Bt1,500 per child*) is a no-touching tour with elephant snack-making, non-interactive feeding, observation and a vegetarian buffet dinner. The elephants are free to roam and munch at will across the sanctuary’s 20-hectare grounds, while guests can observe their natural behavior from the comfort of their own safe space. [phuketelephantsanctuary.org](http://phuketelephantsanctuary.org).



### 3. Animal Adventures with Airbnb

Travelers who miss their four-legged friends while on vacation now have **AirBnB’s ‘Animals’ experiences** to fill the void. Tours run the gamut from herbal-compress therapy for dogs to afternoon tea with sheep to glamping with orcas. All experiences are governed by World Animal Protection guidelines, which ban any intentional contact with wild species, excepting approved conservation tours. Top picks for Asia include loris-spotting in Sri Lanka, horse-whispering in India and Bryde’s whale-watching in the Gulf of Thailand. [airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com).

no. 3

## A panoramic lunch atop Bangkok.

Bangkok’s newest sky-high venue has just opened for lunch on the 76th floor of the Kingpower MahaNakhon building. Thailand’s loftiest restaurant—**Mahanakhon Bangkok SkyBar**—launches its panoramic daytime dining experience with a seasonal set menu by executive chef Joshua Cameron and cocktails designed by the Sorum brothers (of Rocket, and Hyde and Seek fame). Expect hearty, colorfully plated menus that encompass Thai and international flavors and include plenty of on-trend options for vegetarians. After lunch, diners gain free access to the SkyWalk on the 78th floor, the building’s open-air observation deck where the more adventurous can shimmy out onto a glass pane 310 meters above street level. [mahanakhonbangkokskybar.com](http://mahanakhonbangkokskybar.com); starters from Bt350, mains from Bt500.



Mahanakhon Bangkok SkyBar.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF G ADVENTURES; COURTESY OF PHUKET ELEPHANT SANCTUARY; PHOTO BY ALEX PYRON DISTRIBUTED UNDER CC BY 3.0 LICENCE; COURTESY OF KINGPOWER MAHANAKHON





Inside the Four Seasons Langkawi's Geopark Discovery Centre.

no. **4**

## Five-star kids' activities in a UNESCO wilderness.

In the tropical wilderness of Langkawi, on the fringe of Southeast Asia's first UNESCO Global Geopark, an evolved breed of kids' club is burying its peers in the sandpit. At the **Four Seasons Langkawi**, the Lutong Club ("lutong" is Sundanese for dusky leaf monkey) has launched their complimentary Kids for All Seasons program for four- to 12-year-olds, which challenges any summer camp for parents-free adventure. Youthful energy is channeled into cultural activities (batik painting, kite making, fishing); nature tours (like a macaque-spotting "swamp-skipper" mangrove cruise); "Junior Masterchef" cooking classes; abseiling and rock climbing; and supervised monkeying around in the club's undercover playground. For active teens, there's also archery, bird safari-ing, cycling tours and waterfall bathing.

If that weren't enough, the resort also offers a Geopark Discovery Centre that provides info on the 550-million-year-old geological wonder of Kilim Karst next door, with science-y displays and several park tours guided by the center's naturalists. Add to this a wide range of private, family-friendly rooms, suites and pool villas, gourmet in-villa dining, and an immense "four-in-one" beachfront pool with fountains and free fruit popsicles, and you've got a bona fide kid heaven that adults can also enjoy. *fourseasons.com*; doubles from RM2,156.—BEK VAN VLIET



Pristine Langkawi beach.

no. **5**

## A charitable artisan boutique for cool Cambodian wares.

Shinta Mani Hotels and architect/designer Bill Bensley have just opened Shinta Mani's Shop With A Heart, a boutique specializing in handmade, artisan-crafted items from Cambodian creatives. A trove of local goodies, the boutique's wares range from jewelry and accessories to collectibles and objets d'art, plus an exclusive collection of one-off denim jackets customized by Bensley designers (from US\$500 each). One hundred percent of profits from the boutique go to the Shinta Mani Foundation in support of local community projects.

A second Shop With A Heart opens this month at the Shinta Mani Wild luxury tented camp in the Cardamom Mountains with merch that reflects the rich and eclectic décor of the camp's tents. Hot items include Burmese elephant opium weights (from US\$150–\$400) and bracelets upcycled from animal traps reclaimed from the forest. Profits go to the Wildlife Alliance, whose projects include wildlife rescue, rainforest protection and community outreach. *fb.com/Shinta-Mani-Shop-with-a-Heart*.



Outside Shinta Mani Siem Reap.



Upcycled bracelets.



Neatly tucked into  
a mature forest,  
The Living Pavilion.

# One With Nature

Set in old forest amid history-laden north Kyoto, a new Aman wants you to do little more than wander, contemplate and explore both its own vast grounds and the neighborhood it calls home.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTOPHER KUCWAY





**BATHED IN** the half-light of 6 a.m., my room takes on an otherworldly aura. A black bowl with two Japanese pears—you know, that fruit too beautiful to eat—that sit atop a carefully folded sheet of white paper is a still life manifest. Beyond it outside is my own Japanese moss garden, where maple trees drip with the last of the overnight autumn rain and a two-meter-high rock wall holds back a steep, forested mountainside. My bed is deeply comfortable but the outdoors beckon. Sliding open the floor-to-ceiling glass doors, I step barefoot onto the moss, sinking into this natural sponge, cool water squeezing around my toes as I inhale the crisp air. Nature. I'll admit, the rebel in me stirs, thinking this is the last thing I should be doing. I know never to set foot on green sacred ground in Japan, whether at a Shinto shrine or a Buddhist temple. Traditionally, a Japanese garden is meant to connect people to the spiritual world by being observed rather than walked on. At the new Aman Kyoto though, guests are invited to enjoy the gardens—by admiring and using them.

Opened just last month, the **Aman Kyoto** is set in dense forest to the north of the historic city. On 34 secluded hectares, most of its structures are built on manicured parcels of land that had been set aside for what was to be a museum dedicated to *obi*, the ornamental sash of a kimono. The museum never came to fruition, giving way to this wellness retreat. Today, that translates as four main guest buildings, each housing six 68-square-meter rooms—opt for one on the ground floor—an arrival pavilion, a pair of two-bedroom villas up on the hillside, two restaurants and a spa with its own *onsen*. Linking them all are irregular stone pathways that evoke a different century, doubly so when you consider that the moss-covered surroundings here dampen sound and keep most man-made additions well hidden behind stands of cypress, *yama momiji* maples and more than a few towering *kitayama-sugi*, or Japanese cedars.

Everything emanates from the forest and garden. Anything man-made is built around and within



**FROM TOP:** Think of the guestrooms as contemporary *ryokan*; calming tea and Japanese sweets after a spa treatment.





nature, resulting in a sense of calm that plays off the greenery. The designers behind Aman Kyoto, Kerry Hill Architects, first came across the garden back in 1995. “The largest challenge was to design buildings which neither compete with, nor destroy, the existing garden,” Justin Hill, a director at the firm, tells me. “Pavilions were sited only on existing clearings within the garden to minimize the impact on the landscape.”

Each building features glass walls framed in dark wood that blend in with the surrounding, mature forest. Indoors, that transparency merges guestrooms into the natural setting, aided by interiors featuring bright, blond woodwork and tatami-mat floors. Combining this Japanese aesthetic—highlighted by a massive *ofuro* bathtub made of hinoki cypress in the spacious bathroom, and a *tokonoma*, a simple alcove in the living area set aside solely for appreciating the art it contains—with Western touches such as a lower-than-usual bed, each room embraces the ideals of minimalist geometry. The sliding wooden doors separating the entry, the bathroom and the living area disappear into walls and are easily shut with a single finger. As I discovered on that first morning, these intimate spaces are filled with the subtlest of light, fostering relaxation and contemplation. This gentle illumination radiates in part from knitted-bamboo lanterns made using the same techniques, and wrapped in the same Echizen *washi* paper, as traditional Japanese bamboo umbrellas.

West-facing rooms offer views of moss-covered stones and the mountainside; those looking east, of a creek and into forest. Ascending the hillside on foot uncovers the pair of two-bedroom villas set along an avenue of Japanese cedars that overlooks the entire garden—a soothing view with autumn’s colors starting to appear. Crows caw, deer return guests’ stares and there has

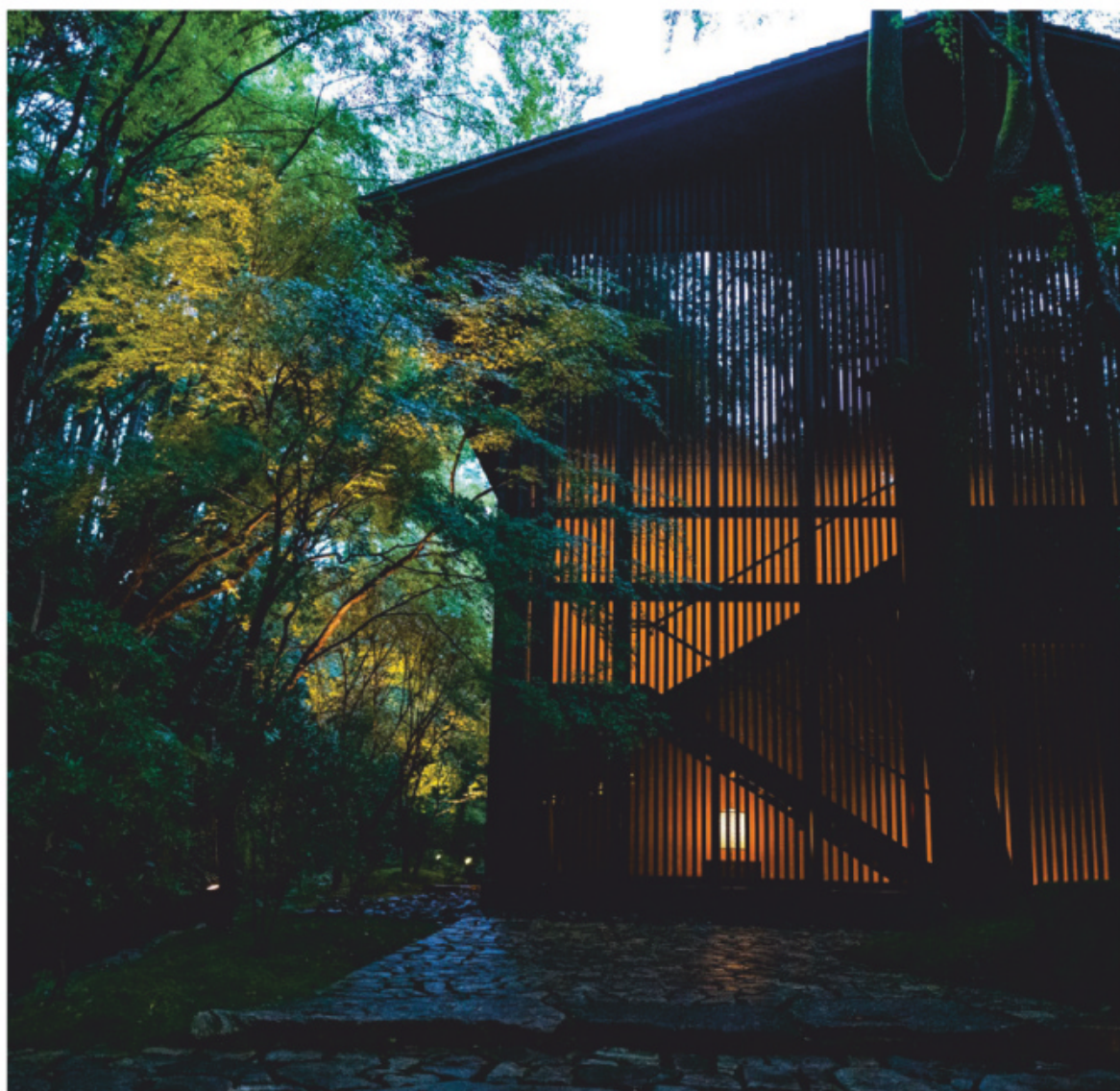


even been a warning about a local bear. Nature is always close at hand here. “That sense of containment within the forested garden,” Hill says, “gives rise to a feeling of a contemporary *ryokan*, which is residential in nature and sits naturally in its setting.”

I had arrived in a nighttime downpour, and my first full day was an on-again, off-again series of rainstorms, but at this property, that simply did not matter. In fact, I came to the fast conclusion that you almost need to experience these lush, green grounds in the rain: that’s when their true nature comes out. The following day brought intermittent sunshine, the long shadows of autumn, which made me see Aman Kyoto in, yes, an entirely different light. Wells filled, setting the garden’s natural irrigation system—a series of small waterfalls and rivulets—into motion.

Of course, Kyoto is a magical destination in its own right. The Aman shares the same mountainside as the popular Kinkaku-ji Temple, the Golden Pavilion, a 20-minute walk away. Simply taking in everything on the property is a definite option. So too is exploring the neighborhood, one as rich in history as it is in greenery. Count nearby Imamiya Shrine and the sprawling but beautiful Ryogen-in Temple as two must-visits. The latter is home to five Zen gardens that dialed me down even more than the Aman. Each defines calm.

Yet Aman’s general manager, Akira Shiota, stresses that it’s his staff that make the real difference. He says they aim to help guests on their journey, and he doesn’t mean by booking a taxi, though of course they do that when needed. “Our property is the place to recall truly important moments in life, a place to



FROM TOP: Japanese crab in a fine mix of okra, radish and mushroom; local artisans decorate the Aman; guest pavilions blend into the landscape. OPPOSITE: A warm welcome at Taka-an; fish carpaccio with yellow yuzu and bottarga.





FROM TOP: A knitted-bamboo lantern at Aman Kyoto; a moment of Zen at Ryogen-in Temple; another take on the temple.

find peace,” Shiota explains. “There is a sense of the seasons in everything in our hotel.”

That distinctly Japanese idea extends to the menus. Both Taka-an, a Japanese restaurant, and Living Pavilion by Aman, which serves Kyoto-style and Western cuisine—do not miss the bite-sized fish and chips—reflect this. “I want you to experience the seasonality of the cuisine; of the ingredients we get from around Kyoto,” explains the easy-to-laugh executive chef Kentaro Torii, who likes to call it “land to table.” Believe it: Torii was out in the forest early each morning collecting chestnuts that had fallen in a typhoon the week before I arrived. For its part, Taka-an offers set courses where the pieces in each serving are meticulously crafted by hand. The shape and consistency of a piece of fish and tofu in a dashi broth, for instance, is perfect, bringing together textures and tastes that shouldn’t hold together, but do. Sea bream from Hokkaido, local figs and the freshest mushrooms I’ve ever tasted are staples during my stay.

Local sake, green tea and cold-pressed *tsubaki*, or camellia oil, are on the menu of a different sort at Aman Spa, which is also home to an *onsen*. Soaking in the hot waters, learning how to breathe again and enjoying a *shiatsu* treatment is where the ideal of connecting with nature has its strongest pull.

Rising before the sun to catch a taxi to meet a train that would connect with my plane—from the garden to the street to the sky, in other words—I realized that, just as the moss garden had absorbed me, I had taken on qualities of this natural setting. I had eaten its mushrooms and chestnuts. I’d soaked in the scalding mineral waters of its *onsen*. Breathed its autumnal air and let the rain fall through the trees on to me, a sturdy 18-rib Japanese umbrella in hand, but at my side. That moss garden and everything connected to it was now a part of me in this quiet corner of Kyoto, one of my favorite spots on any map. +

*Aman Kyoto; aman.com; rooms from ¥130,000.*





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## THE OKURA TOKYO A Reinvented Icon

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### The Okura Heritage Wing

Reprising the former Hotel Okura Tokyo's iconic Japanese beauty, the 17-story Okura Heritage Wing inherits the simplicity and elegance expressed in the hotel's original 1962 opening. The layout provides optimum privacy, while guest rooms offer generous floor areas of about 650 square feet, many with spacious living areas and balconies facing the spectacular Okura Garden. Savor authentic fare at Yamazato Japanese restaurant or in the Chosho-an tea ceremony room.

### The Okura Prestige Wing

The 41-story Okura Prestige Tower showcases Tokyo's global appeal with refined Japanese aesthetics. Guest rooms begin on the 28th floor, affording city vistas from every room. Live large in the ultra-luxe, three-bedroom duplex suite, featuring a theater and waterfall bath. Take in fabulous views of the city from the top floor while

dining in Sazanka, the hotel's reborn teppanyaki restaurant, or enjoy all-day dining indoors or outdoors at Orchid.

### An Ideal Location

The Okura Tokyo is set in Toronomon, a high-end district studded with glass skyscrapers and luxury stores, which is on the way to becoming a major Tokyo hub. Nestled on a hillside, the hotel is surrounded by the Okura Garden, an expansive urban oasis that captures the beauty of each season and incorporates the *karesansui*—Japanese rock garden—tradition. The site is also home to the Okura Museum of Art, which draws art lovers with its collection of pre-modern Japanese and East Asian art.

### A Legacy Kept Alive

Original décor from the former hotel's lobby—considered a Japanese modernist masterpiece—finds new life at The Okura

Tokyo. Legacy decorations include the hexagonal Okura Lantern ceiling lights, lacquered tables and chairs arranged like plum flowers, and the world map and clock displaying global time zones. The lobbies of the Okura Prestige Tower bear the design of celebrated architect Yoshio Taniguchi, who redesigned New York City's Museum of Modern Art and is the son of Yoshiro Taniguchi, the original designer of the Hotel Okura Tokyo's famous lobby.

**Find out more at  
[theokuratokyo.jp/en](https://theokuratokyo.jp/en).**

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**THE LEGEND**

*Reborn*

In the heart of Tokyo, there is a hotel with service so legendary, it is quite simply without peer. Rebuilt from the ground up, The Okura Tokyo features a 17-story Heritage Wing that melds traditional Japanese elegance with matchless luxury, and a 41-story Prestige Tower that combines the modernism of the hotel's original decor with a host of 21st-century amenities. But what truly distinguishes The Okura Tokyo is not the scale and grandeur of its new facilities — it is the legendary service that has made it Japan's premier hotel for over half a century.

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#### The Ideal Urban Retreat

Centrally located but surprisingly peaceful, The Capitol Hotel Tokyu is steps from the Imperial Palace, Ginza's many shops, and the centuries-old Hie Shrine, one of the most significant religious buildings in Japan. You're also an easy walk from the buzzing nightlife destinations of Akasaka and Roppongi. When it's time to go exploring, the hotel has direct access to Tokyo Metro's subway lines, which will take you straight to the area's many sites. You're also just 30 minutes away from Haneda Airport and 60 minutes from Narita Airport.



#### Design That Dazzles

Spacious, luxurious, and quintessentially Japanese in aesthetic, all 251 guest rooms offer far-reaching views over the city skyline, with some vistas stretching all the way to Mount Fuji on a clear day. A modern take on a traditional Japanese home, rooms feature white washi-paper bedside lanterns and sliding *shoji* panels so you can customize your space. With a glorious lobby designed by famed architect Kengo Kuma, who also masterminded the new National Stadium in Tokyo for the 2020 Olympics, the hotel reflects the look and feel of temples and shrines. Admire Japanese art throughout the property, including calligraphy and *ikebana*, the art of flower arrangement.

#### Explore Authentic Japan

You don't have to leave your hotel to taste top-class Japanese cuisine at the award-winning Suiren restaurant. Diners experience the delicacy and precision of *kaiseki* cuisine at Suiren, led by master chef Minoru Tsuge and famous for its *teppanyaki* and tempura cooking demonstrations. On the 14th and 15th floors it's all about relaxation with a swimming pool and gym-with-a-view. The Carju Rajah Tiado spa has a private Japanese *onsen*-style bath, the perfect warm-up for treatments including Eastern medicine-inspired massages. Be sure to take part in authentic experiences such as wellness packages, off-site dining with geishas, and Shinto ceremonies at the adjacent Hie Shrine.

Discover your own Japanese escape at [capitolhoteltokyu.com/en/](https://capitolhoteltokyu.com/en/).

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# A Taste of Luxury in the Heart of Tokyo



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Photo by Tomooki Kengaku, courtesy of TRUNK

## TRUNK(HOUSE)

# Bask in Beauty

NEW TO TOKYO'S BUZZING HOTEL SCENE, TRUNK(HOUSE) IS A MODERN-DAY "SALON"—AN EXCLUSIVE, RESIDENTIAL-STYLE HUB FOR SOPHISTICATED TRAVELERS WHO APPRECIATE CULTURE AND LUXURY.

### The Space

Set in a 70-year-old, two-story former geisha house, the private, one-suite TRUNK(HOUSE) retains a traditional charm while bringing the first "townhouse hotel" to Tokyo. Created by the team behind Tokyo's edgy TRUNK(HOTEL)—which made *Travel + Leisure's* 2018 It List—the building has been meticulously restored and renovated in a way that is both authentic and highly upscale. Inside is a world unto itself where you can dance in your own high-tech karaoke room, dubbed "the smallest disco in Japan," complete with a glitter ball and private bar; relax in a mini indoor garden; and feast on fare prepared by your own private chef.

### The Design

The hotel's dazzling interiors reflect its geisha house roots and its unique Tokyo style. Throughout the space you'll find specially commissioned bespoke design pieces, such as a sofa and side table by Stephen Kenn, and lighting fixtures by Jean Prouvé and Serge Mouille. In contrast to its contemporary touches, the

genkan-style stone entry has been restored to its original form, while dark terrazzo floors, paper screens, and stained-glass windows complement the building's traditional wooden architecture. Room designs incorporate homegrown touches such as washi paper and indigo dyeing. Inside and out, the hotel preserves a rare slice of Tokyo that is home to a thriving arts, culture, and literature scene.

### The Location

Stationed along a secluded backstreet in Tokyo's central Kagurazaka neighborhood, TRUNK(HOUSE) offers an exclusive immersion into local culture. Upon stepping outside, you'll find yourself walking the narrow, maze-like stone streets of an Edo Period entertainment district known by locals as "a little Kyoto in Tokyo." The ideal base for the most authentic of Tokyo experiences, Kagurazaka is home to still-active *ryotei* (Japanese traditional restaurants), stylish cafés, restaurants, bars, speakeasies, and boutiques, as well as shrines, temples, and geisha entertainment.



### The Food

Watch, wonder, and connect with the TRUNK(HOUSE) team of hand-picked chefs as they prepare a special menu of local and international dishes—anything from provincial Japanese fare to formal French cuisine—from the townhouse's open kitchen. Every meal is an event, starting with a hearty Japanese breakfast consisting of a spread of rice, miso soup, and various side dishes. Arrange a privately prepared dinner of local specialties using seasonal ingredients, or ask your personal butler to dish up snacks and lighter meals such as ramen and Japanese curry.

### The Garden and Dining Area

Relax and escape from the ever-buzzing metropolis within your own compact, delightfully landscaped indoor garden designed by Oryza, a leading Japanese landscape architectural firm. Enjoy the dining area that overlooks the garden, featuring Japanese plants and stones salvaged from the wall that once encircled Edo Castle.

### The Tearoom

Find more moments of relaxation in the traditional tearoom. Laze around a comfy *irori* fireplace (a traditional Japanese sunken hearth typically used for heating and cooking), and recline on tatami flooring with leather cushions. Savor local teas and authentic culture, and admire artwork by artist Chiaki Hirano, who specializes in *kirie*, the Japanese art of paper cutting.

### The Bath

Inspired by the *senjo*, revered communal bathhouses once found in every town in Japan, the bathroom is a showstopper. It's outfitted with an aromatic Japanese cypress wood tub surrounded by *shunga* (Japanese-style "adult" artwork) printed on white tiles by the contemporary *ukiyo-e* painter and woodblock print artist Masumi Ishikawa. As you soak, enjoy exclusive amenities developed in collaboration with centuries-old French beauty brand L'Officine Universelle Buly, as well as organic skincare items from Japan.

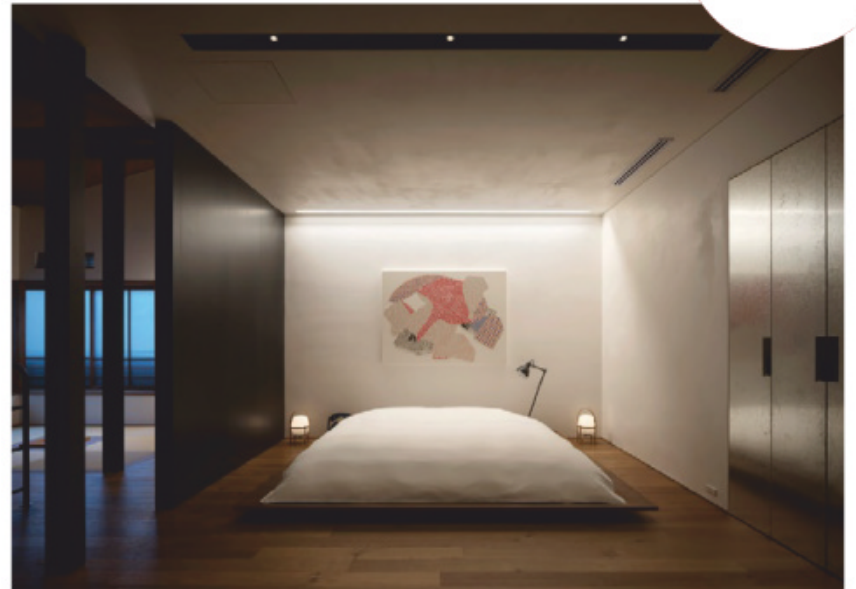
Inspiring and immersive, TRUNK(HOUSE) is a rare connoisseur experience that preserves an authentic piece of the city's rich history.

Find out more at [trunk-house.com/en](https://trunk-house.com/en).



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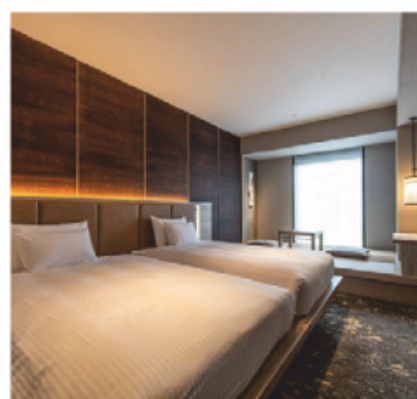
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## THE BLOSSOM HIBIYA.

**Tokyo.** In the heart of a mega-metropolis that is magnificent from above, THE BLOSSOM HIBIYA has planted the seeds to connect the world with Japan—in particular Hibiya Park, the Imperial Palace and Ginza, all of which are a short stroll away. Arrive smoothly from Haneda Airport, Narita Airport or Tokyo Station and land in this ravishing nest. In the lobby, the artwork and vibe combine for a modern-day expression of the vibrant, old-world gatherings at the Rokumeikan, an 1883 edifice famed for its galas and a symbol of Japanese civilization. Come to understand the art of Kyushu hospitality through

its traditional crafts on display, and its flavors in sake and cuisine made with rice and water originating there.

When you're ready to dive into the cocoon that is your room, you'll find soft colors, and imagery of the history of Hibiya and the four seasons in traditional Japanese paper walls, and on the carpeting and other fixtures. Twelve premium rooms on the highest floors are approximately 60 square meters each, and boast panoramic views from their floor-to-ceiling windows. Your new favorite hotel awaits above Tokyo. Find a flower blooming in the sky of Hibiya.

## THE BLOSSOM HAKATA Premier. Fukuoka.

A charming city epitomizing Japanese culture, Fukuoka has recently been graced with a new perfect rose. THE BLOSSOM HAKATA Premier is nestled in a convenient spot within walking distance of historic shrines such as Kushida, as well as the lovely old streets of Hakata and shopping districts like Canal City Hakata, and offers wonderful guest programs to give you a real sense of the place. When you return home via the evocative entrance that conjures trees and stones, you'll feel en route to a forest bath. Indeed, the hotel has a wonderfully calming Japanese *sento*, so

you can soak the worries of the world away.

If you're looking for full relaxation, book one of the 13 luxury rooms on the top floor. The design unravels the traditional elements of Japan, Fukuoka and Hakata, replacing them with a present-day feel in a way that both soothes your mind and stimulates your intellectual curiosity. You'll have exclusive access to HAKATA LOUNGE, where you enjoy complimentary drinks, including wines and sake from the Kyushu region. It's the most sophisticated stay in Fukuoka. Stylish Hakata entertains you with the finest hospitality.





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NOW ACCEPTING RESERVATIONS FOR ITS JANUARY 2020 OPENING, THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED PORTOM INTERNATIONAL HOKKAIDO PROMISES LUXURY, ENRICHMENT, AND THE PERFECT BASE FROM WHICH TO EXPLORE HOKKAIDO.

#### Gateway to Hokkaido

With a convenient location inside New Chitose Airport, the hotel provides easy access to Japan's northernmost and least developed island. One of few luxury hotels in Hokkaido, it's an ideal base for discovering a land of awe-inspiring beauty and wide-open spaces. The concierge can offer suggestions tailored to your needs—from renting a limousine to savor fine food in a nearby restaurant, to traveling by air to take in the natural splendor of Hokkaido.

#### Sublime Accommodations

Decorated with gorgeous works of Japanese art, the hotel's sleek, spacious guest rooms and suites range from 462 to more than 2,500 square feet. Relax and refresh in the Sukiya, Rimpa, and Zen suites, each featuring a personal, in-room hot-spring *onsen* (bath). Suites also include a Western and Japanese buffet-style breakfast.

#### Japanese Encounters

Through personalized service and authentic experiences, Portom International Hokkaido takes you on an enriching journey.



**Art** ➤ Enjoy Japanese fine art throughout the hotel, including works rarely seen in Hokkaido. You'll find Fushimi dolls by Ito Jakuchu and Japanese woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*) in the lobby, guest rooms, and guest salon. An installation by Sometsukasa Yoshioka, a Kyoto-based textile dyeing workshop, adorns the elevator hall. And on the richly textured walls of the lobby lounge, discover the "Ishuretsuzo" by Hakyo Kakizaki—a portrait series of the Ainu people that celebrates ancient Hokkaido history and culture.

**Culture** ➤ Experience an authentic tea ceremony in the hotel's teahouse, built in centuries-old *sukiya-zukuri* style, which uses lights to express the natural passage of time. You can also participate in classical Japanese dance in the hotel's large tatami-floored banquet hall.

#### Creative Cuisine

Dine on fine Western-style and Japanese fare without ever leaving Portom International Hokkaido. The hotel boasts two outposts of iconic restaurants: Shimogamo Saryo and Tateru Yoshino.





With an original location in Kyoto near Shimogamo Shrine—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—Shimogamo Saryo was founded in 1856. Combining innovation and tradition in an elegant atmosphere, the restaurant offers Kyoto-style *kaiseki* dishes inspired by traditional tea ceremonies, creating one-of-a-kind dining experiences.

Michelin-starred Tateru Yoshino's eponymous restaurant showcases modern French gastronomy at its best: dishes made with carefully selected seasonal ingredients, perfectly matured cheeses, desserts of great beauty, a superb wine list, artistic presentation, and polished service.

### Discovering Hokkaido

Step off the plane in New Chitose Airport and you're practically in Portom International Hokkaido. From here, explore a destination beloved among luxury travelers for its four-season beauty, buzzing capital city, and exquisite art and cuisine. Don't miss hot spots like these.

### Shikotsu-Toya National Park

➤ With spectacular scenery that includes caldera lakes, onsen towns, and volcanic mountains, this park is a great spot to hike or fish; rent bikes, boats, and scuba gear; and unwind in the surrounding hot springs. Climb Mount Tarumae, an active stratovolcano, where you'll be greeted by impressive alpine vistas and superb views of Lake Shikotsu.



### Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park

➤ From April to early June, this 25-acre park turns a vivid pink, thanks to its broad blooming fields of delicate *shibazakura* (moss phlox). This is the epitome of spring in Hokkaido, and the vivid contrast of the pink moss and expansive blue sky is simply breathtaking. Visit during the springtime Shibazakura Festival, which features local cuisine and performances.

### Kushiro Shitsugen National Park

➤ Set on Hokkaido's southeastern end, this park is home to the only known population of the endangered Japanese crane—a traditional symbol of both longevity and Japan. Now numbering over 1,000, the cranes are a big draw for nature photographers and bird watchers alike.

**Start your explorations at [portom.jp](http://portom.jp).**



**For booking options, scan the QR code.** Simply open your phone camera and hover over the QR code to connect.







# NAVIGATING JAPAN

SIMPLE TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME TRAVELERS.

## Practice your bow.

➤ To greet a person, bend your body 15 degrees forward for a casual bow. Also give a small bow before and after a meal, to thank the host. When you meet elders, bow deeply from your waist.

## Go left.

➤ Drive and walk on the left (opposite) side of the road. You'll also park on the left and use the left side of escalators and elevators.

## X marks the spot.

➤ When you're ready to pay your bill at a restaurant, cross your forefingers together to form an X. The waiter will come to you with your check.

## Keep your fingers to yourself.

➤ When you want to point toward someone or something, use an open hand. Pointing at anything with your forefinger is considered rude.

## Shhh.

➤ Don't use your cell phones on trains and buses, or talk to people on public transportation. People usually sleep, read, or listen to music quietly.

## Charge it up.

➤ Buy a rechargeable IC card, which can be used to pay fares on public transportation (and at many vending machines, shops, and restaurants) simply by touching the card on a reader. You can load the card up with yen as you go along.

## Hop aboard.

➤ Japan's trains and buses are clean, on time, efficient, and convenient to almost everything. Just make sure you check the timetable before you head out.

## Walk this way.

➤ The best way to explore much of Japan is on foot—so bring comfy, durable shoes.

## Learn the language.

➤ At least a little. Japanese people are extremely accommodating, but knowing a few simple phrases will take you far. Start with *ohayou gozaimasu* ("good morning") and *arigatou gozaimasu* ("thank you very much"), and you'll be rewarded with a big smile.



CLOCKWISE FROM  
RIGHT: Zin  
Adventures'  
Phnom Penh tour  
stops for lunch; Zin  
co-founder and  
guide Jimmy Hiem;  
raw-meat offerings  
at Wat Phnom.



# The Tattooed Tour Guides

Carving out a new life in Cambodia, a group of deported  
refugees brings a deeper resonance to local tours.

BY RON GLUCKMAN

**"LOOK HERE,"** says my guide, Jimmy Hiem, pointing to a long mound of dirt. "Mass graves." We're in the lush, green hills of Kirirom National Park, a three-hour drive southeast of Phnom Penh. The air is fresh, clean, invigorating; the park offers a welcome chill, with some of the only pine trees in Cambodia. Which is why, during Cambodia's Golden Age of the 1950s and 60s, it became a renowned retreat from the heat of Phnom Penh for the royals and the capital's elite.

Jimmy, 46, is well versed in the history of flourishing, post-colonial Cambodia, though he is the product of a diametrically opposed era—namely, the reign of the Khmer Rouge, who took power in 1975 and were responsible for those graves and some 1.7 million others.

That year, when Jimmy was two, his family fled Cambodia to a refugee camp on the Thai border, where Jimmy's younger sister was born. The family eventually wound up in Los Angeles where Jimmy grew up trying to find his place among the Asian immigrants in the public-housing projects. But in 2016, he was deported to Cambodia, one of about 700 former refugees expelled here from the U.S. since 2002. He now runs **Zin Adventures**, a tour company whose guides are all, like him, victims of the heartrending Khmer Rouge carnage who thought they'd escaped, yet are







FROM TOP:  
Praying at Wat  
Phnom; the gilded  
interiors of the  
14th-century  
temple; the stairs  
to Wat Phnom are  
guarded by  
mythical *nagas*.



now forced to continue struggling with it—personally and intellectually—more than four decades later.

Tourism in Cambodia has long tapped its tragic past. But Zin digs deep, finding sites less seen and telling stories less known. Today, we're going off the standard civil war-torn path but staying within its theme, swerving up wildly curving roads to tidy alpine villas whose designs encapsulate the post-colonial aesthetic of Khmer architecture blended with new modernism—and whose bullet-ridden walls are reminders that no place in the country was safe from the genocide and starvation that killed a quarter of the population, not even Kirirom, which means “mountain of joy.”

The irony is not lost on Jimmy and his fellow deportee and Zin guide, Bunthoeun Ly, who sprinkle tales of their country's tragic past with personal details of their own expulsion from what they had hoped would be the promised land in the U.S. Like Jimmy, most of these deportees arrived in the U.S. as toddlers or, like his sister, were actually born outside Cambodia, in refugee camps. Human rights groups note that such deportations violate international law, since the refugees were never citizens of Cambodia.

We speak of their separation from families in America, and traumatic readjustment in the land of their ancestors—a land they never knew until being banished here, forever. Jimmy, who left five children in the U.S., does not sugarcoat his life there. “I got beat up a lot. There were gangs, stabbings. I joined a Cambodian gang just to protect myself from all the bullying,” he says. “I was just trying to survive.” Still, it was home, and he fought a deportation order for more than a decade before finally being sent to Cambodia.

Ly, 37, who goes by Looney, by contrast had enjoyed a middle-class existence in Long Beach, California. Though he was born in Thailand, he says, “I always thought I was American.” He served as a U.S. Marine, but never realized he needed to file residency papers to remain in the country until it was too late. Drug charges from high school curtailed his eligibility to apply as an adult and in 2016 he was deported to Cambodia. Both he and Jimmy describe unimaginably hard adjustments to their new realities, and Jimmy concedes bottoming out, wrapping himself in self-pity and yearning for his children. Nowadays, he's focused on building a new life in his family's homeland. “Letting go of your





life in America is hard,” he says, “but you cannot live in the past.”

*Zin*, in fact, means “fresh” or “original” in local slang, and was formed with dual purpose: to offer unique tours from intellectually curious, native English-speaking guides, and to employ and empower returnees who are often spurned from work because of their tattoos and lack of local language skills. Jimmy’s partners are Maria Tucker, who works for international organizations in Cambodia, and Brad Gordon, who has spent decades as a legal and business consultant in Cambodia, and worked in refugee camps on the Thai border. It’s a social enterprise as well as a genuine business that offers rare opportunity; Jimmy thinks the model could be expanded to Vietnam and Laos, which have also received deportees from the U.S.

For now, *Zin* remains exactly as promised: fresh and utterly original. On a tour of Phnom Penh we visit idyllic sights alongside grisly reminders of the tumult that tore the country apart, narrated with esoteric insights from the guides. We visit historic churches hidden in back alleys, and houses of politicians and poets. At the 14-century Wat Phnom, Looney retells the colorful legend of the founding of the capital. Later, strolling along the waterfront, the pair debate the exact site of the original port, and detail a little-known conflict with Dutch forces in the 1600s. I lived in Cambodia for four years, and have been visiting for 25 years, but this was all new to me. And just a part of the rich history of Cambodia these *Zin* researchers have uncovered.



The Kirirom tour was *Zin*’s first, and the depth of inquiry behind it provides me new perspective on this part of the country. “We spent months putting it together, exploring and talking to local people,” Jimmy says. “We wanted to give tourists a taste of the beauty of Cambodia, but also some of the history, including the Khmer Rouge time.” The first stop is a beautiful temple at Snguon Pich. Looney tells how the old abbot stopped a potential bloodbath by standing up to Khmer Rouge and national soldiers. Guns were drawn, but when they fired, the abbot remained unharmed. “He got them to stand down,” Looney says. He also points out holes in the beautiful carved ceiling: “That’s where the Khmer Rouge hung people and tortured them.” About 1,400 were believed killed here, he says. A newer stupa offers a memorial display of bones dug up from a series of mass graves.

“This is Cambodia,” Jimmy says. “We don’t hide anything. People need to see how it was, so they understand how it is.” And who better to tell hard truths than *Zin*? [zinadventures.asia](http://zinadventures.asia); one-day Kirirom Mountain tour from US\$140. +

FROM ABOVE LEFT:  
Zin guides in action;  
The old Chinese  
House Restaurant.





# Taipei's Food Scene Heats Up

With a group of young, wildly creative chefs leading the way, the Taiwanese capital is emerging as Asia's buzziest culinary destination.

BY MATT GROSS. PHOTOGRAPHS BY SEAN MARC LEE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: White-chocolate bread pudding with liquid nitrogen-infused foie gras at Impromptu by Paul Lee; Taipei's Daan neighborhood; the marinated-crab dish at Ephernité; Binjiang Market.



IN TAIWAN, the highway rest stops are destinations in their own right, thanks to the unusually elaborate snacks they serve. Those snacks—congee, tea eggs, roasted sweet potatoes, and other humble, nourishing, everyday delights—have lodged in the brain of chef Kai Ho. At **Tairroir**, his elegant, Michelin-starred, three-year-old restaurant in the capital, Taipei, Ho serves a dish called Memory of a Highway Rest Area. The congee is lush; the yolky, yielding, Pu'er tea-marinated egg comes from silkies, the black-skinned chickens prized for their medicinal value; the broad, crispy buckwheat *tuile* that lies across the top is dotted with sweet-potato fondant and wisps of green herbs. You want to savor it, yet it vanishes in a few bites, a brief stop on a multicourse tasting menu that romps through the island's traditions and ingredients with dishes like roast Ping-tung pigeon, salt-baked bamboo shoots, and Taiwan Beer tofu mousse.

Ho belongs to a new generation of chefs who are reimagining what fine dining means in Taipei. They're a mix of Taiwanese and expats—including veterans of kitchens in Vegas and Paris—who could be running restaurants anywhere in the world. Yet they've chosen to make their homes and careers on this particular island.

“I want to showcase culture, history, everything,” the 34-year-old Ho told me. He's referring to his menu's hard-to-define blend of regional cuisines from mainland China, Japanese influences from the half-century Taiwan was a colony, and homegrown dishes and flavors rooted in the island's mountains and oceans: braised pork, briny oyster omelettes, beef noodle soup, and unnervingly fresh mangoes and guavas.

At Tairroir, the food is playful, unpretentious, and deeply rooted—in short, a deliciously accurate yet updated evocation of the Taipei I've come to know over 22 years of regular visits (many of them with my wife, who grew up in the city). The current high-end culinary scene in Taipei is, like in Singapore and Bangkok, a complementary evolution from its still-thriving lower-brow food culture. YouTubers assiduously document their night-market visits. Instagrammers showcase local trends like wobbly pancake towers and lattes adorned with images of Shiba Inus. Bubble tea, invented in Taiwan in the 1980s, is now ubiquitous in cities across Asia and the Taiwanese soup-dumpling restaurant Din Tai Fung has locations in most corners of the region as well as in the U.S, the U.K and in the Middle East.

Gen Creative, where the menu reflects the Taiwanese, Korean and Guatemalan heritage of its chefs.







Chef Vanessa Huang at Ephernité.

The movement began in 2014 with the opening of two restaurants. **Raw**, which sits just north of the city center in Taipei's Dazhi neighborhood, was launched by André Chiang, the Taiwanese chef behind Singapore's (now closed) Restaurant André. It focuses on Taiwan's 24 "microseasons"—the subtle shifts in weather throughout the year that produce stellar but short-lived raw ingredients. Meanwhile, Taipei's restaurant-dense Daan District saw the arrival of Mume, where chefs from Australia, the U.S. and Hong Kong apply New Nordic principles to local ingredients.

By 2018, those two had been joined by many more. Taipei native Vanessa Huang returned from France to bring her artistry to **Ephernité** (best dish: a delicate rainbow terrine made with several seasonal, local vegetables). Lam Ming Kin, originally from Hong Kong, and the former chef de cuisine at Jean-Georges Shanghai, opened the cozy-yet-upscale Longtail, which serves a mashup of French- and Japanese-inflected mains. And Eric Liu, Hansang Cho and Melanie Garcia, who'd been cooking in some of Las Vegas's best restaurants, came to collaborate on their own place: **Gen Creative**, in the Daan District.

Liu lived in Taipei as a boy, but the Korean-American Cho and the Guatemalan-American Garcia had never even visited. Cho said he didn't need much persuasion, though: "Eric didn't convince me to move to Taipei. He didn't have to. We always shared the same dream of opening a restaurant of our own. Sometimes things happen for a reason, and we were all at the right place in our lives to take that next step."

Taipei's energy was evident as the trio led me around the produce and fish markets of the city's Zhongshan District one morning. Storefronts stocked a dozen kinds of clams and squid in deep, bubbling, cold-water containers; one farmer sold remarkably leafy basil; a roving cart offered piles and piles of fragrant strawberry guavas. No lettuce, though: its microseason hadn't started yet. When the shopping was done, it was time for breakfast around the corner, at **Gusto Market of Taste**, an Italian grocery store where we munched on panini while the owner demonstrated to Japanese tourists in a cooking class how to pound veal cutlets. The mix of cultures and cuisines seemed incredibly natural, as cosmopolitan as it was laid-back.

You get the same feeling at Gen Creative, where the hearty dishes nod both to local traditions and to the chefs' own backgrounds—radish cake incorporates chorizo, fried chicken is accented with pomelo, hot-and-sour soup is deconstructed into an eggy, explosive puzzle. Gen, you may not be surprised to learn, means "roots" in Mandarin.

Apart from Kai Ho, none of the chefs I met called their restaurants Taiwanese. Yet they were cooking Taiwanese ingredients (mostly) for Taiwanese people (mostly); their culinary training might be French or Californian, but didn't that put them in line with the centuries of migrants—from China, Japan and beyond—whose contributions form the basis of "official" Taiwanese cuisine?

To expect such a label—or any label, for that matter—however, is to overlook the reason these chefs came to Taipei in the first place. "We do everything like a fine-dining restaurant, but we don't consider ourselves a fine-dining place," said Paul Lee, another Las Vegas veteran, who was born in Taipei and raised in California. His Michelin-starred restaurant, **Impromptu**, which opened last summer and serves a 12-course tasting menu—one that includes red rice with watermelon jelly, deconstructed squid-ink lasagna, skewered sweetbread with bergamot and sesame-leaf gremolata—goes for a mere NT\$2,140 per person. He describes Impromptu, tentatively, as "modern American." But really, he said, "we just want our own identity in the culinary scene." And in a city chock-full of identities—all of them shaped by a world's worth of experiences, each presenting a uniquely delicious facet of Taipei—he fits right in. +

## TRIP PLANNER

### Ephernité

[ephernite.com](http://ephernite.com);  
tasting menus  
from NT\$1,770.

### Gen Creative

[gentaipei.com](http://gentaipei.com);  
mains  
NT\$305–\$1,955.

### Impromptu

[impromptu.com.tw](http://impromptu.com.tw);  
tasting menu  
NT\$2,140.

### Longtail

[longtail.com.tw](http://longtail.com.tw); mains  
NT\$455–\$1,650.

### Mume

[mume.tw](http://mume.tw);  
mains from  
NT\$970.

### Raw

[raw.com.tw](http://raw.com.tw);  
tasting menu  
NT\$1,830.

### Tairoir

[tairoir.com](http://tairoir.com); tasting menus  
from NT\$1,560.



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SINGAPORE SOUTH BEACH



# Common Ground

A funky crop of co-living spaces is transforming millennial travel across Asia. **Grace Ma** finds sharing is caring in Singapore's newest community-hotel hub. >>

Lyf Funan  
Singapore's  
six-bedroom  
duplex.

COURTESY OF LYF FUNAN



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In lyf Funan's six-bedroom duplex.



DIY laundry at lyf.



Stylish bunkbeds in ST Signature.

**WE COUNT NO FEWER** than six USB points in our room, and an almost equal number of sockets, all within easy reach whether I'm sitting at the desk or my preteen daughter is lying on the top bunk bed—which she claimed immediately with a delighted squeal. I fill up the water jug at the dispenser down the hallway. Our private bathroom is stocked with refillable bottles of all toiletries (thumbs up for eco-friendliness). Outside our door, like everyone else's, hangs a college-dorm-reminiscent blackboard on which my daughter doodled "hello!" in chalk. There is a mini gym, a retro-bright laundromat and a *Masterchef*-worthy communal kitchen equipped with branded appliances... just BYO groceries from the supermarket in the mall downstairs, where we can also hit up the rock-climbing wall. Underneath is City Hall MRT station, 45 minutes straight to the airport.

Welcome to **lyf Funan Singapore** ([lyfbyascott.com](http://lyfbyascott.com); doubles from S\$150), the city-state's newest and largest co-living property—which brings back the good ol' vibe of staying in a hostel, but with a lot more comfort, class and sass. It's as ideal an abode as any intrepid, connection-hungry traveler could desire, and just one of several new players that have burst onto Singapore's co-living scene in the past few months, echoing a phenomenon that's steadily creeping across the Asia Pacific. In a country of skyrocketing property prices and prohibitive rental agreements, it's easy to see why.

This 412-room hub in the Central Business District has far surpassed traditional ideas of room- or house-sharing. You're not bundled in with a motley crew of residents or trying to get some sleep in a crowded dorm. At lyf, as with any co-living space worth your time, you inhabit an integrated space that has been purposefully designed for sharing with a community of like-minded, peripatetic souls. This natural evolution in hospitality combines the best of all worlds: the functionality of an apartment, the wallet-friendliness of a guesthouse, the design of a boutique hotel, and the social activity of a buzzing hostel.

Lyf also adds flexibility to the mix, straddling the long stay/short stay divide. They've done away with memberships and minimum-required nights, and room categories, from studios to six-bedroom apartments with kitchenettes and dining areas, cater to every traveler type.

Fellow newcomer ST Signature Chinatown, which opened in a converted Singapore shophouse last month, also allows for nightly bookings. An upmarket, gold-accented twist on hostel living, their small, smartly designed "cabins" provide cozy private spaces, while a common kitchen and patio invite guest interaction. On the other end of the spectrum with a more residential style are Hmlet and Commontown, aimed at students and young workers who want to stay in the city without paying city prices. Hmlet, the largest co-living operator in Singapore, stands out with its handpicked character buildings. Its latest in Singapore is Cantonment, inside a 1950s heritage building that has housed both a school >>



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Cute co-living at Hmlet.



Bold gold accents at ST Signature Chinatown.

and a police headquarters. Last month the brand expanded internationally, launching a Sydney property in a former warehouse, and the purpose-built Shibuya Shoto, their first outpost in Japan, where they plan to eventually open 10,000 rooms. Commontown's model is a little different, renting rooms in apartment clusters they refer to as "towns." Life here is more like in an extended-stay hotel, with furnishings, linens and cleaning standard, of course, plus community activities, and even pets are allowed. Cove takes the "co" in co-living to another level by including flatmate matching as part of the deal.

For travelers though—especially short-stayers—efficient operations and excellent customer service will always take priority. That lyf is owned and operated by veteran hotel company The Ascott Limited bears out in its quick response to problems (staff came to my rescue immediately when my key card didn't work); its homey rooms were kept fresh by daily housekeeping and weekly deep-cleaning; and its effervescent "Ambassadors of Buzz" and "lyf Guards" (a.k.a. guest-service officers), charged to host social events, conduct property tours and float around the hotel making sure everyone's happy.

We may have been at lyf Funan for only 18 hours on a staycation, but during that time I managed to chat with London-based executive Victoria at the end of her four-day stay, and Australian post-graduate student Chris who was on a six-month exchange program from his Japanese university. When we went to the kitchen for the morning's activity—making a traditional Singaporean breakfast of *kopi* (coffee with condensed milk), toast and half-boiled eggs—we got to spend time with lyf Guards Win, Usha, Hafiz and Gen, who shared travel tips and hangover cures ("eat really spicy Indomie noodles with lots of water"). Imagine the people I could meet and the knowledge I could pick up with a stay of a week, a month, or a year. For the social traveler, sharing with strangers could be the next best way to see the world. +

## CONNECT HERE

Singapore's co-living scene is exploding—here are some of its major players.

### ST Signature

Compact rooms and shared bathrooms with gold fixtures and bidet toilets rule in the brand's first property in Chinatown, while a new flagship in the Tanjong Pagar business district just opened in November. The proprietary Chat-In technology allows guests to check in and out online and talk to other guests without revealing

room details. More locations are planned for key residential and business hubs in Singapore, as well as Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo. [stsignature.com](http://stsignature.com); singles from S\$60 per night.

### Hmlet

The Singapore-based start-up has been going places since it debuted its first location in the city-state in 2016. In the last two months, it opened its largest property in Singapore and its first ones in Japan and Australia. You can manage everything from laundry to housekeeping

services on the Hmlet app and bond with fellow residents over activities such as cocktail workshops and yoga classes in bright and cheery spaces, nestled in neighborhoods with character. Some properties offer bookings for a short as one week. [hmlet.com](http://hmlet.com).

### Commontown

With eight Singapore locations, this Korean start-up enters Indonesia and Malaysia next year. The fully furnished rooms come with or without en-suite bathrooms and contracts begin

at three months. Services such as Wi-Fi, utilities and weekly housekeeping, and the use of communal spaces such as lounges and a rooftop terrace are all included in the rate. [commontown.sg](http://commontown.sg).

### Cove

This flat-sharing company matches tenants based on their interests, and features rolling month-by-month rental after the initial three-month contract is up, making it a solid option for business travelers and digital nomads. [coveliving.co](http://coveliving.co).



## *Lausanne Montreux Riviera*

*Lausanne, the Olympic Capital, Montreux Riviera, UNESCO-listed Lavaux vineyard terraces, Glacier 3000, Chillon Castle, Chaplin's World by Grévin, Paddle Steamer Cruises CGN or MOB-GoldenPass Line, a few of our highlights not to be missed on your next trip to Switzerland.*

[\*www.lake-geneva-region.ch\*](http://www.lake-geneva-region.ch)

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**Switzerland.**



# Stories that stay at The



The Fullerton Hotel Sydney.

If these walls could talk, they would tell of hidden gold and secret tunnels. They'd whisper the colourful tales from workers of the historic post offices, lighthouse keepers and the forefathers of two iconic cities. Residing in historic heritage buildings in these prominent gateway cities, The Fullerton Hotel Singapore and its new sister property The Fullerton Hotel Sydney are living, breathing museums, housed in former General Post Office buildings. Steeped in history, the preserved luxury heritage hotels connect guests with the stories of these destinations and the characters that helped build them.

Owning two highly coveted addresses (No. 1 Fullerton Square in Singapore and No. 1 Martin Place in Sydney), The Fullerton Hotel Singapore and The Fullerton Hotel Sydney are imaginatively woven into the legend of their respective destinations. From an underground tunnel that led directly into a pub in Angel Place—where it was customary to go on a sneaky lunch break—to discovering 35cm-long gold bars while sorting the mail, historians working with The Fullerton Hotel Sydney have collected personal tales that offer a fascinating insight into what life was like during the bygone era. All the collected tales and memories of old and new form “Fullerton Stories”, which brings guests closer to the location, history and culture of each destination.

A great deal of custodial responsibility goes into the preservation of each Fullerton property, including painstaking research on the past and ways to preserve the architectural and social heritage of the buildings. Alongside fresh nuances and contemporary details, nostalgic touches evoke the individual spirit of each property, and history is captured through stories of food, art, culture, and the personalities behind them. Within this unique backdrop, guests are invited to create stories of their own.

Built in 1928, The Fullerton Building, now The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, was the heart



The Grand Staircase, The Fullerton Hotel Sydney.



# Fullerton Hotels and Resorts

of the Lion City's social and commercial endeavours. In 2015, it was gazetted as the country's 71st National Monument and has become a base for discovering the city's colonial and maritime history. Within the hotel, guests can admire many original architectural details and motifs, all of which have been meticulously restored. "We are fortunate to be located right in the heart of the Lion City, where we are surrounded by iconic landmarks including the Padang, Cavenagh Bridge, Anderson Bridge and Elgin Bridge. In short, we are where Singapore's rich history comes alive," says Cavaliere Giovanni Viterale, General Manager of The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts.

That commitment to heritage, arts, culture and culinary excellence is further fostered in the brand's bespoke Fullerton Experiences, which offer activities including complimentary on-foot heritage tours for guests and the public in Singapore and now, in Sydney.

A revitalised time capsule with localised experiences at its core, The Fullerton Hotel Sydney shares more than pedigree with its siblings. The Fullerton Hotel's traditions, such as afternoon tea (pandan lamingtons, anyone?), and the signature 'Sydney Sling' cocktail are among the offerings at No 1 Martin Place. A spin-off of the Singapore Sling, the 'Sydney Sling' has authentic native touches, including Australian gin and ginger, but the cross-cultural exchange doesn't stop there. Paying homage to the Asian heritage of the brand, The Fullerton Hotel Sydney's new restaurant The Place serves up Southeast Asian dishes with Modern-Australian twists, such as Laksa paired with Australian prawns and scallops.

There are few luxury hospitality brands with a collection of hotels whose outward identities are so wonderfully and pleasingly different. From much-loved Grand Dames like The Fullerton Hotel Singapore and Sydney to the striking, ultra-modern Fullerton Bay Hotel which sits on the waters of Marina Bay, each hotel has a unique character and a special story to tell.



The Fullerton Bay Hotel Singapore and The Fullerton Hotel Singapore.



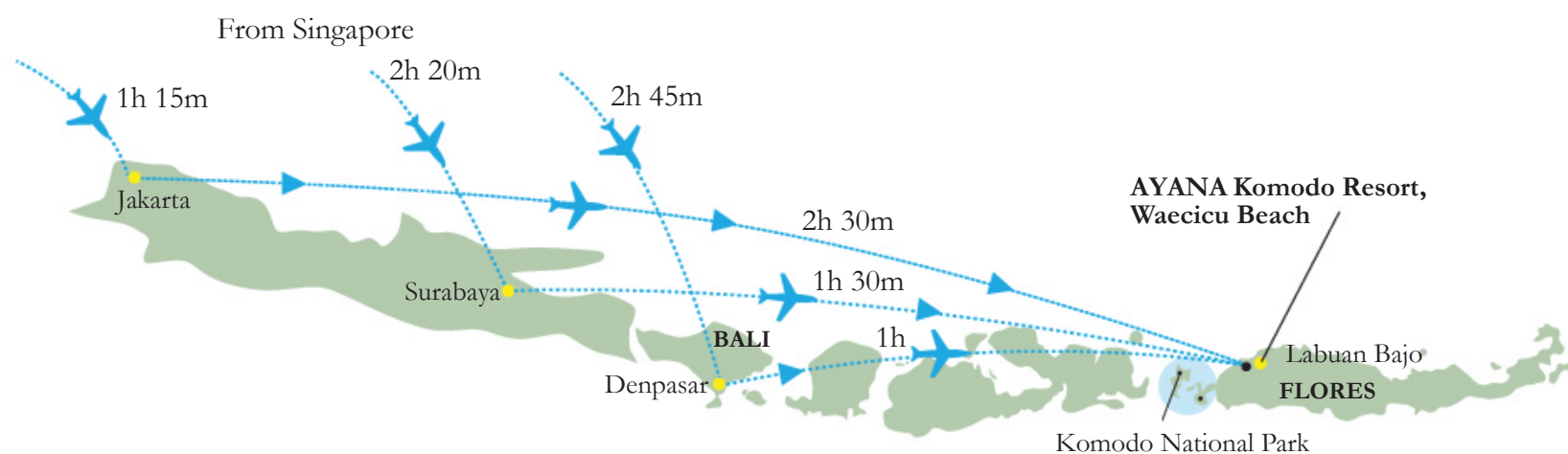
The Clifford Pier, The Fullerton Bay Hotel Singapore.



# Discover a place where wishes come true



Celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve in the luxurious surroundings of AYANA Komodo Resort, Waecicu Beach and enjoy a selection of festive activities in tropical paradise. Just a one-hour flight from the island of Bali, you can soon be on the edge of Indonesian paradise settling into the Flores Island's first five-star resort overlooking the private Kukusan Island and Naga Pier. The latest member of AYANA Hotels not only offers jaw-dropping views and finest dining options but makes the perfect launch point for exploring the wonders of Komodo National Park such as Pink Beach, Padar Island, Taka Makassar sand bank and Manta Point.



AYANA Komodo Resort, Waecicu Beach  
Labuan Bajo, Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia 86554  
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[AYANAKOMODO.COM](http://AYANAKOMODO.COM)





# THE BEST OF 2019

This year, our favorite cities shot up with a legion of luxury hotels, while drinking and dining spots gave us fresh takes on traditional cuisines, sustainable menus and creative cocktails.

A pool with a view at The Residences at Kauri Cliffs, New Zealand.

## A KIWI COUNTRY RETREAT

There's scenic and then there's New Zealand edge-of-a-cliff breathtaking. In November, Robertson Lodges unveiled The Residences—three new four-bedroom villas—at their Kauri Cliffs property in the very top of the North Island. These luxury houses were created with families in mind, offering plenty of space for communal downtime amid elegantly cozy interiors by renowned designer Virginia Fisher. A stay here includes daily breakfast, pre-dinner drinks and canapés, dinner and the resort facilities of Kauri Cliffs: tennis courts, a gym, a sauna and an indoor heated pool (though the villas each have their own private saltwater pool). To soak up the million-dollar panoramas guests can hit the resort's walking trails, or swim or surf off its three private beaches. There are also organized activities families can enjoy together, such as land-based fishing and guided heritage tours. [robertsonlodges.com](http://robertsonlodges.com); *The Residences from NZ\$17,000 per night.* —BEK VAN VLIET



# / THE BEST OF 2019 /



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Cocktail #3 at The Sea by The Old Man; a mackerel tart at Aulis and Roganic; a clean aesthetic meets clean eating at Nectar; Rosewood's light-filled Harbour Corner suite.



## HONG KONG

### EAT + DRINK

#### Louise

A departure from the meticulous tasting menus of his Odette in Singapore, Julien Royer's first foray into Hong Kong reimagines the farm fare of his childhood growing up in the countryside of Auvergne. Park yourself on the green patio with a well-crafted tipple before heading upstairs for Royer's elegant take on comfort fare, from *pâté en croûte* to rosemary-perfumed roast chicken. [louise.hk](http://louise.hk); two-course lunch from HK\$398.

#### Nectar

Hometown hero Peggy Chan espouses her clean-eating

crusade through multi-course tasting menus at this high-end restaurant that's taken over her flagship Grassroots Pantry. While the experience has been polished and refined, Chan's playful sense of humor remains intact in the faux-spicy tuna roll and the vegan cheese course with dairy-free versions of pepper jack and gouda. [nectarexperience.co](http://nectarexperience.co); Original Grassroots five-course menu from HK\$680.

#### Aulis and Roganic

At experimental tasting-counter Aulis, celebrated UK chef Simon Rogan is delivering a farm-driven, *omakase*-style menu rooted in seasonal

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF THE SEA BY THE OLD MAN; COURTESY OF AULIS AND ROGANIC; COURTESY OF NECTAR; COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD



British ingredients. Two-bite delights range from a fig-and-chervil foam tart to house-made truffle-bread pudding. Find the chef's counter too stuffy? A selection of dishes is served at Roganic next door in a less formal setting. *roganic.com.hk*; *Aulis dinner tasting menu from HK\$1,480, Roganic full tasting menu from HK\$980.*

### The Sea by The Old Man

The dream team of Agung Prabowo, James Tamang and Roman Ghale has hit another home run with the sophomore venture to award-winning The Old Man (ranked ninth on World's 50 Best Bars). The Sea builds on the theme of Ernest Hemingway's seminal novel, from maritime-inspired interiors to signature cocktails infused with the mineral elements of the ocean. *theoldmanhk.com*; *signature cocktails HK\$95.*

### Shady Acres

This new indie wine bar on Peel Street epitomizes cool—think funky natural wines, a menu rife with pop-culture references, and not one but two happy hours daily. Helming the project are two industry veterans, Mike Watt and Ryan Nightingale, who've joined forces to deliver one of the best new neighborhood bars in town. *theshadyacres.com*; *cocktails from HK\$75, "break even bottle" wine from HK\$50 per glass.*

### Dai Bing

Classic long drinks and highballs reign at Dai Bing, the second act to beloved gintonería, Ping Pong 129. Translating to "big ice" in Cantonese, the focus is on custom ice blocks made in the city's first "Artisanal Ice Suite." The specialty "bing" anchors a refreshing list of long drinks: *shiso* gin-and-tonic, vermouth spritzer, matcha highball—all chased down with Portuguese-style

snacks. *fb.com/daibinghk*; *long drinks from HK\$110, wine from HK\$80 a glass.*

## STAY

### Rosewood Hong Kong

Opened in March, this showstopper has staked its claim as the crown jewel of arts-and-design district Victoria Dockside. The hotel's towering façade on Kowloon waterfront belies its cozy interiors, with 322 guest rooms exuding a distinct residential vibe. The eight F&B concepts range from The Legacy House, serving Shunde specialties, to DarkSide, a discreet lounge for cigar and cocktail connoisseurs that playfully picks up the local nickname for the mainland-adjacent part of the city where the hotel resides. *rosewoodhotels.com*; *doubles from HK\$5,000.*

### The St. Regis Hong Kong

Designer André Fu has worked his magic once again at The St. Regis Hong Kong, weaving the brand's familiar trademarks—Art-Deco touches, a Prohibition era-styled bar—into a new design template set to serve as the archetype for future properties. With 129 rooms, the hotel spares no expense in luxury amenities, complete with personal butler service and world-class cuisine headlined by chef Olivier Elzer's L'Envol. Life here is all freshly shucked oysters and champagne. *marriott.com*; *doubles from HK\$3,285.*

## DO

### Silencio

In the mood for something more? Match soulful tunes with whimsical *izakaya* fare at jazz bar Silencio, where you can be serenaded by award-winning vocalists as you nibble creations from former executive chef of Nobu Hong Kong, Sean Mell. Come after 10 p.m. to indulge in free-flow sake and gourmet bar bites. *silencio.hk*; *HK\$188 per person.*—LESLIE TSIANG



FROM TOP: A calamansi tart at Louise; the mural-backed St. Regis Bar; late-night tunes at the theatrical Silencio.







# INDONESIA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Café del Mar; brunch at Sensorium; the terraced architecture of the Apurva Kempinski; a room at Potato Head Studios; the Smoky Fuchow cocktail at Hakkasan; Uni Bali's bright interior.



## EAT & DRINK

### Hakkasan, Jakarta

This modern Cantonese globetrotter might have originated in London, but it doesn't turn its nose up at local ingredients. The Michelin-starred restaurant's 11th outpost opened on the 25th floor of Jakarta's Alila SCBD this year, where *yum cha* and à la carte meals are served in glossy interiors among stretching skyscrapers. Alongside signature bites, produce from local markets provides the anchor for eats such as the stellar Indonesian mutiara lobster with glass noodles. [hakkasan.com](http://hakkasan.com); menus from Rp788,000, vegetarian from Rp498,000.

### Uni Bali, Canggu

It's not everywhere you can order French chablis by the glass in Canggu. A joint effort between the Mexicola Group, former Urchin chef Steven Skelly, and libation-literate Nicolas Lento, this newcomer offers a casual culinary affair that's as much about drinking as it is eating. Choose from two tasting menus, where Japanese-inspired creations—such as barramundi with calamari, mushroom and bone sauce—are enjoyed with beverage pairings of teas, cocktails, natural wines and sake. [uni-restaurant.com](http://uni-restaurant.com); mains from Rp370,000.

### Sensorium, Canggu

Born and raised in North Sumatra, William Salim is the head chef and owner behind this innovative Modern Australasian concept on Batu Bolong. With years working in fine diners in Australia under his belt, William has honed his craft into an edible art and his all-day menu is designed to stir the five senses. Don't miss the Asian pulled-pork Benedict and brunch ramen with 62-degrees egg and pickled daikon. [sensoriumbali.co.id](http://sensoriumbali.co.id); mains from Rp100,000.

## STAY

### The Apurva Kempinski, Nusa Dua

There's plenty of competition in Bali's resort-laden Nusa Dua, but this striking new 475-room oasis has had no trouble standing out. Inspired by the island's *subak* rice terraces, the hotel cascades from the cliff top down to the Indian Ocean, with modern Balinese accents of natural stone and glistening waterways enhancing its tranquil vibe. [kempinski.com](http://kempinski.com); doubles from Rp2,869,200.

### Potato Head Studios, Seminyak

Ending 2019 on a high note, the final piece of the Desa Potato Head puzzle opens this month. Nestled among the village, the floating ring is lifted by reinforcements and houses 168 guest rooms and a sunset bar. The studios are artfully appointed with furniture made from recycled plastic and sustainable materials, designed by British designers Max Lamb and Faye Toogood, and handcrafted by Balinese artisans using age-old techniques. [katamama.com/desa-potato-head](http://katamama.com/desa-potato-head); doubles from Rp2,500,000.

## DO

### Café del Mar, Batu Belig

The shoreline of Batu Belig is sleepy no more. With its iconic all-white façade, lagoon-like pool, cabanas, extensive cocktail list, throbbing tunes and swim-up bar, this renowned Ibiza import is going Balearic in Bali's Canggu. Hosting a line-up of international DJs and artists, the Med-inspired venue has all manner of lounging setups, including four deluxe private suites for serious strutting, plus a menu of refreshing dishes—you know you want ceviche, *fritto misto* and Balinese apple pie with ice cream. [cafedelmarbali.id](http://cafedelmarbali.id).

—JENNY HEWETT



# AUSTRALIA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Vibrant counter seating at Joy; seasonal dishes at Pipit; The Fullerton in the old GPO building, Sydney; The Bailey in Cairns; The Fantauzzo Art Series hotel.



## EAT & DRINK

### Joy, Brisbane

Don't believe a word Marie Kondo says; food is still the best way to spark joy. And husband-and-wife chefs team Tim and Sarah Scott are the alchemists of just that at their 10-seater laneway eatery in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley. Sprayed with graffiti, the tiny, counter-dining space is intimate and edgy, and despite being the new kid on the block, it has already received two hats (Australia's answer to the Michelin star). Unsurprisingly, there's a waitlist, so book well in advance. [joyrestaurant.com.au](http://joyrestaurant.com.au); A\$100 for nine courses.

### Pipit, Pottsville

Ben Devlin (Noma and Paper Daisy) is one of the most acclaimed young chefs in Australia. And yet his newly hatted coastal eatery in the northern NSW beach town of

Pottsville is as unassuming as it gets. Devlin creates everything from scratch, turning seasonal produce over a wood-fired grill to generate the bold, balanced flavors that underscore his frequently changing menu. This is fine dining at its most sincere. Even the duck-fat caramels and sweet potato petit fours are memorable.

[pipitrestaurant.com](http://pipitrestaurant.com); mains from A\$25.

## STAY

### The Fantauzzo, Brisbane

The latest installment of one of the country's most exciting boutique hotel brands, this homage to award-winning Australian painter Vincent Fantauzzo offers six floors of appropriately art-filled spaces. Overlooking the revamped Howard Wharves, the 166-room hotel has been carved into the cliff side and features

original works from the artist, as well as 500 giclée reproductions of his most famous works. In addition to complimentary art tours for guests, there's a rooftop pool and a handful of attractive venues for eating and drinking. [artserieshotels.com.au](http://artserieshotels.com.au); doubles from A\$223.

### The Fullerton, Sydney

The Singaporean brand has shacked up in one of Sydney's oldest and most prestigious addresses. Housed in the former General Post Office ("GPO," first opened in 1874, at No. 1 Martin Place), Fullerton merges grandiose heritage architecture with contemporary culinary, art and cultural experiences, giving guests the opportunity to explore Sydney past and present. As with its historic Singaporean counterparts, the Fullerton offers free heritage

tours, which here uncover the building's iconic role in the federation of Australia. [fullertonhotels.com](http://fullertonhotels.com); doubles from A\$300.

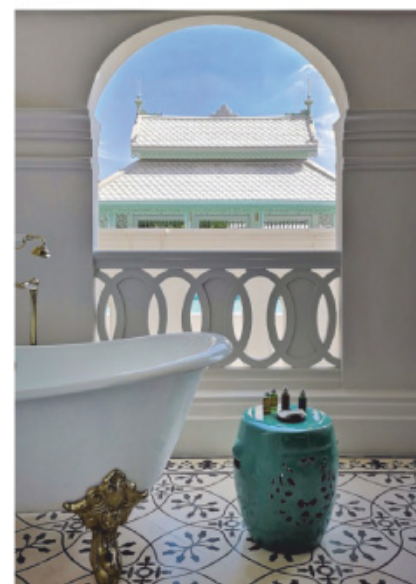
### The Bailey, Cairns

Far North Queensland got a whole lot hipper in the last 12 months. The second of three luxury Crystalbrook Collection hotels to open in Cairns, The Bailey (creative sibling to The Riley) is a bold celebration of art and originality. Green foliage climbs through its foyer and public spaces are littered with artworks from regional and national artists. Balancing high-minded sensibilities is some true-blue Aussie tucker, with a steakhouse and the Milk Bar, which serves up super fun ice-cream sundaes and other nostalgic treats. [crystalbrookcollection.com](http://crystalbrookcollection.com); doubles from A\$225. —J.H.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Cabochon's fierce new Cabinet of Curiosities; InterContinental Phuket Resort; old-school recipes from Samrub for Thai; terrace space at The Inside House; brunch at Luka Café, at Siri House.



# THAILAND

## STAY

### Rosewood Bangkok

Rosewood had a big 2019, and among their host of openings is this residential-style hotel tower whose room count includes four with their own plunge pools and two with Jacuzzis. Nan Bei is one of the best Chinese restaurants in Bangkok, and certainly the best looking; top-floor loft-like speakeasy Lennon's has a 6,000-strong vinyl collection. With a skywalk to the Skytrain station and its proximity to the expressway, the hotel also has strong traffic jam-avoidance bragging rights. [rosewoodhotels.com](http://rosewoodhotels.com); doubles from Bt9,900.

### Hyatt Regency Bangkok

Rolling down three flash levels atop this new shiner on central Sukhumvit is

Spectrum, a club/lounge/rooftop bar designed by Japanese cool kids Super Potato, where the high-end snacks menu includes *pata negra* and lobster rolls, and the best seats in the house are beachclub-style banquettes floating in the skyline. Rooms are all about the views, too, with floor-to-ceiling windows firmly rooting you in the city. Market Café has authentic Thai fare, the outdoor pool is cute and leafy, and you've got direct access to the Skytrain for a life of ease. [hyatt.com](http://hyatt.com); doubles from Bt5,100.

### InterContinental Phuket Resort

On a stunning stretch of what is known as Millionaires' Mile on Thailand's most popular island, heaven makes a strong play for being an actual place

on Earth. Inspired by the Traibhumikatha, the ancient Thai text, which explains heaven, this new beach resort brims with works by local artists that reinterpret the theme—and a trip to Sati Spa, where treatments incorporate age-old Asian wisdom, will make you feel divine. There are six pools, three kitchens that prioritize sustainability and local sourcing, and 180-degree panoramas over Kamala Beach. [ihg.com](http://ihg.com); doubles from Bt6,080.

### The Inside House, Chiang Mai

With plenty of pretty stays on offer in Chiang Mai, Thailand's hub for boutique hotels, few stand out like this Lanna colonial-style house. The dreamy stark-white mansion features seven different

categories of pool suites—you can swim on your balcony, then take a star-lit bath out there too if the mood strikes—all of which manage to be both elegant with their marble floors and homey with their tropical floral accents. Daily complimentary high tea, which includes homemade treats and local teas, is the cherry on top. [the-insidehouse.com](http://the-insidehouse.com); doubles from Bt7,590.

### Cabinet of Curiosities, Bangkok

Ready for a safari? The newly opened top-floor residence in Bangkok's best boutique hotel is not for the delicate hearted. Interior designer Eugene Yeh built the eight-room, old world-style Cabochon from the ground up to the rooftop pool, keeping a penthouse for his personal use whenever he

FROM TOP LEFT: CHARLES DHARAPAK; COURTESY OF INTERCONTINENTAL; COURTESY OF SAMRUB FOR THAI; COURTESY OF THE INSIDE HOUSE; COURTESY OF SIRI HOUSE



visited the city. Now, he's opened its reclaimed-wood doors to reveal an upscale adventurer's antique- and taxidermy-filled apartment brimming with books, tchotchkes, teeth-baring hides and vintage Vuitton from his own eccentric collection. [cabochonhotel.com](http://cabochonhotel.com); *Cabinet of Curiosities* Bt25,000 per night.

## EAT+DRINK

### Siri House, Bangkok

Finally, a place that transitions seamlessly from day to eve. The clubby Siri House invites you in from breakfast right through midnight: come for impeccable classic breakfast and brunch fare at Luka Café, stay for flame-happy Quince with its great grilled meats and melty cheeses, and let cocktail bar Jacqueline keep you fueled along the way. The multi-nook Midcentury villa is a cozy spot to see and be seen, and the tropical garden with photogenic pool is a lovely place to explore their well-considered wine list. [sirihouse.com/bangkok](http://sirihouse.com/bangkok).

### Mia, Bangkok

Don't let the awesome wallpaper fool you. On the wide-ranging menu at the city's new Instagram darling, the tastes more than match up to the aesthetics. Their foie gras doughnuts and uni tart (and pink-velour room draped in flowers) may have lit up your newsfeed but comfort food, like the tender grilled pork chop and the heavenly hot smoked salmon, is what'll keep you coming back. Kick off in the classy bar with a butterfly pea-tinged Yuzu Loulou, and wrap up with a pre-ordered melt-in-your-mouth, burnt-edged *tarte tatin*. Don't forget to hit the hidden head at some point; it's a delight in its own right. [miarestaurantbkk.com](http://miarestaurantbkk.com); dinner for two Bt3,000.

### Crimson Room, Bangkok

With a mini amphitheater in the middle of the city, the

team behind award-winning Rabbit Hole has turned the speakeasy trend on its head—or just taken it back a century, to the Jazz Age. The gold-cage bar up top serves drinks to a solid crowd of beautiful people perched in descending tiers of red-velvet booths, facing the full band swinging on the front-and-center stage nightly. [fb.com/crimsonroombkk](http://fb.com/crimsonroombkk); drinks for two Bt800.

### Samrub for Thai, Bangkok

The maestro who'd been running the line at Nahm for years, chef Prin Polsuk, has been teasing our palates with pop-ups of his deeply researched, forgotten Thai-cookbook recipes. Now he's settled into his own space, a tiny chef's-table, open-kitchen restaurant hidden within like-minded locavore 100 Mahaseth. Expect seasonal flavors on a monthly changing menu; November's inaugural included clam, prawn and basil soup, and squid with hearts of palm. Get booking—it only seats 10 diners at a time. [fb.com/samrubforthai](http://fb.com/samrubforthai); set menus Bt3,200–4,500 depending on ingredients.

### 1919, Bangkok

If you're craving Italian aperitivo with Sunday-session sharing plates, the new eatery from prolific Bangkok restaurant group Foodie Collection is the place to settle in. Named after the year of the Negroni's invention, the bar mixes seven variations on the theme (you want the Garibaldi Sour and the White Negroni #2, in that order) created by the reigning Campari Bartender champ, Supawit 'Palm' Muttarattana, accompanied by the most comforting of food from chef Francesco Deiana. Get the clams in white wine, the wild-boar lasagna, and the lavender, orange and honey lamb chops. [1919bkk.co](http://1919bkk.co); dinner for two from Bt2,000.

—JENINNE LEE ST. JOHN



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Spectrum at Hyatt Regency Bangkok Sukhumvit; 1919's Roman-style carbonara; Crimson Room; the Yuzu Loulou at Mia.





## EAT + DRINK

### **Sushi Shin by Miyakawa, Tokyo**

The first Tokyo outpost of Hokkaido's Michelin three-starred Sushi Miyakawa has touched down in the Mandarin Oriental Tokyo. From a 350-year-old hinoki cypress counter on the hotel's 38th floor, Miyakawa's protégé Kazuo Ogura slices, rolls and sears seafood sourced daily from Hokkaido into Edomae-style one-bite wonders right in front of his guests—all with perfectly paired sakes and phenomenal city views to boot. [mandarinoriental.com](http://mandarinoriental.com); *omakase menu from ¥28,000 per person.*

### **Textura, Tokyo**

Spain meets Sichuan in Tokyo's central business district, where chef Hirofumi Saito opened Textura earlier this year. After raking in a Michelin star with Ichirin, a Chinese mainstay in Tsukiji with a sister restaurant in the seaside city of Kamakura, chef Saito now extends his repertoire to Spanish fare. Served as a tasting set or à la carte courses, Textura's menu ping-pongs lithely between complementing Chinese and Spanish flavors, but never fuses them both into a single dish. [whaves.co.jp](http://whaves.co.jp); *High Casual dishes from ¥1,700, High End dinner from ¥8,000 per person.*

## STAY

### **Trunk(House), Tokyo**

Shinjuku's hipster honeypot Trunk(Hotel) has expanded, with its second outpost taking over a former geisha house along a cobblestone alley in Kagurazuka, Tokyo's "little Kyoto." Matching traditional tatami floors, a *genkan*-style entryway and a hinoki-wood bathtub with Charles Eames furnishings and Noguchi lights, this one-room boutique stay is a designer's daydream. [trunk-house.com](http://trunk-house.com); *from ¥442,750 per night.*

### **Park Hyatt Kyoto**

If it's authenticity you seek in Japan's ancient capital, a low-rise beauty wrapped around Kyoyamato, a *kaiseki* restaurant run by the same family since 1877, is where you want to lay your head. Original artwork and traditional handcrafted items from local artisans fill this 70-room property that emulates a *ryokan*, with its minimalist décor, earthy palette and paper doors that slide open to reveal views of the hilly historic area of Higashiyama District. [hyatt.com](http://hyatt.com); *doubles from ¥81,000 per night.*

### **The Okura Tokyo**

After a three-year, 110-billion-yen renovation, Tokyo's grandest of dames is back looking as elegant as ever before—intentionally. The former lobby was so beloved that petitions were raised to preserve its unique Japanese modernist design. The recent revamp introduced a spruced-up version of its former self, including the iconic plum petal-shaped chairs and hexagonal paper lanterns, as well as a completely new wing, the 41-story Okura Prestige Tower. [theokuratokyo.co.jp](http://theokuratokyo.co.jp); *Prestige Tower rooms from ¥58,480 per night.*

## SHOP

### **Muji Ginza, Tokyo**

Located in the thick of Ginza, Muji's new flagship store stocks all the classics you'd expect to find in this minimalist powerhouse. But the brand also shows that it's about more than white cotton shirts. Spread over seven floors, the Muji ethos translates into a design library, gallery, bakery, two restaurants, and a floor-spanning supermarket. Topping it off is Japan's first Muji Hotel, where guest rooms make dreams of sleeping in a Muji showroom a reality. [muji.com](http://muji.com). —CHRIS SCHALKX >>

# JAPAN



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: An *onsen*-style bath tub at Trunk(House); The Okura Tokyo; a *ryokan*-style stay awaits at Park Hyatt Kyoto; a sea-urchin dish at Sushi Shin by Miyakawa, Mandarin Oriental Tokyo.





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**Shangri-La at the Fort**

MANILA



# SINGAPORE



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Parlour of Idlewild; the delicate gastronomy of Cloudstreet; a full renovation preserved the old feel at Raffles Hotel; the Snows of Kilimanjaro cocktail at The Old Man; buzzy evenings at Maduro.



## EAT + DRINK

### Cloudstreet

There's nothing linear about Rishi Naleendra's newest venture: not its beginnings (he shut his previous restaurant after receiving a Michelin star), nor its fare, which is a heartfelt assertion of the chef's Sri Lankan heritage interwoven with his experiences with modern Australian and European cuisine. Served in a moody, foliage-filled backdrop, Cloudstreet's flavor pairings—like a betel leaf-enrobed Coffin Bay oyster with coconut milk and finger lime—are unexpected and deft. [cloudstreet.com.sg](http://cloudstreet.com.sg); set lunch from S\$78, dinner from S\$198.

### Idlewild

This tribute to the Golden Age of air travel takes you to 10 cities along the Transatlantic Route—Lima to London—in 20 drinks. Within InterContinental

Singapore, Idlewild's plush mahogany and brass-clad interior, jazz lineup and "Cabinet of Curiosities" (a mirrored armoire full of more than 50 farflung spirits) make it one of the most inviting bolt holes in town. Must-tries: the Berbere Smash and the Passage to Havana. [idlewild.sg](http://idlewild.sg); cocktails from S\$22.

### The Old Man

Among the shophouses of Keong Saik is this intimate cocktail den, the first international outpost of Hong Kong's famed Hemingway-inspired bar of the same name. The Singapore spot, too, made this year's World's 50 Best Bars list—little wonder given its ingenious blends of Asian ingredients and boundary-busting flavors like The Snows of Kilimanjaro, a sweet-savory fusion of marshmallow gin, lacto-fermented raspberry,

citrus and gruyère. Top points for accessible prices and a familial atmosphere. [fb.com/theoldmansg](http://fb.com/theoldmansg); cocktails S\$17.

## DO

### Maduro

Founded by classical pianist-turned luxury-property broker Peter Ng, this new listening lounge and bar in Dempsey features a thoughtfully curated roster of global talent, laid-back "living room" setting, an eclectic wine list and a whisky selection that veers from accessible (Talisker 10 Years) to extravagant (Macallan M Black). Ng believes in paying it forward—Tuesdays highlight promising musicians from Lasalle College of the Arts. [maduro.sg](http://maduro.sg); cocktails from S\$22.

## STAY

### Raffles Hotel Singapore

Reopened after two years of

extensive renovations, guest rooms have received modern makeovers (with the latest tech) from design doyenne Alexandra Champalimaud, and the historic Long Bar and Tiffin Room were refurbished. New offerings include the book-lined Writers Bar, and restaurants by Anne-Sophie Pic, Jereme Leung and Alain Ducasse. [raffles.com](http://raffles.com); State rooms from S\$836.

—SHAMILEE VELLU

### The Barracks Hotel

This nostalgic transformation of a 1904 army garrison on Sentosa Island offers 40 cozily furnished rooms and suites where vintage accents blend with modern luxury. Comped heritage tours provide some context to the setting, though you're just as welcome to laze by the central pool 24/7 or in a foliage-fringed Jacuzzi shared between the suites. —B.V.V. >>





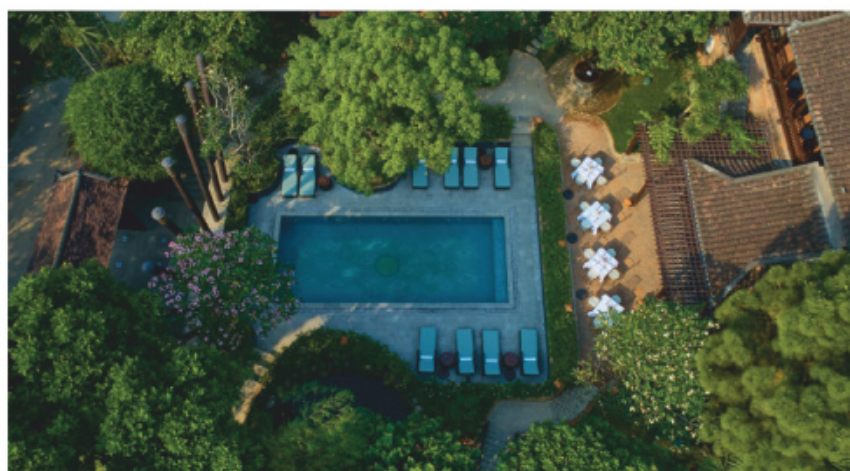
  
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# VIETNAM



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Bone-in beef rib-eye at ThirtySeven; Chef Haong Tung of T.U.N.G. Dining; Ancient Hue Garden Houses' verdant setting; Sol Kitchen & Bar; Mia Saigon; Mai House.



## EAT + DRINK

### T.U.N.G. Dining, Hanoi

What's the most magical fine-dining experience in the capital of Vietnam? Well, thanks to Chef Haong Tung, it's currently Nordic. At his smart, confident eatery guests will be wowed by a three-part, 18-course seasonal symphony. Although they do reveal the core ingredient and flavor, the exact composition of dishes remains a secret until you're served. It's well worth the tease. [tungdining.com](http://tungdining.com); dinner and drinks for two VND4,166,000.

### The Monkey Gallery Dessert Bar & Dining, Saigon

The walls are all bare in this sleek, modern eatery in the city center. Why? "So you'll just focus on our food," says Chef Hong Le. You'll recognize French techniques and taste intense Japanese flavors but Hong—born and raised in Saigon—loves to slip local inspirations, both subtle and bold, into the mix. The tasting menu is a wonder. [fb.com/themonkeygallery](http://fb.com/themonkeygallery); dinner and drinks for two from VND277,800.

### Sol Kitchen & Bar, Saigon

Perched at the helm of his wide, open kitchen, the heavily inked head chef Adrian Chong Yen diligently steers the ship as lively punters fill out his restaurant each night. They come for the high-caliber, crowd-pleasing dishes—and expertly made cocktails—all inspired by the Latin American culinary canon but with plenty of Asian touches. The fun TGIF vibes are just the gravy. [solkitchenbar.com](http://solkitchenbar.com); dinner and drinks for two from VND1,620,000.

### ThirtySeven Woodfire Grill, Hoi An

A phenomenal, and unfussy, dining experience in Hoi An created by the celebrated Vietnamese chef Tran Thanh

Duc and former Park Hyatt Saigon chef Ben Attwater. Order apps (say, beef tartare with quail eggs and fermented chili paste, or a *tiradito* composed of barracuda, local green chilies and lime leaf) at the cocktail bar before moving to the riverside terrace to carve into the imported prime cuts and locally sourced seafood. [thirtysevenwoodfired.com](http://thirtysevenwoodfired.com); dinner and drinks for two from VND2,315,000.

## STAY

### Mai House, Saigon

Exuding plenty of old-world swagger, and certainly not short on contemporary style, this 224-room hotel is the perfect foil to the frenetic streets of 21st-century Saigon. Don't miss your chance to indulge in luxury treatments (with a glass of bubbly in hand) at Four Elements Spa, or savor classic French cuisine at C'est La Vie restaurant. [maihouse.com](http://maihouse.com); doubles from VND3,713,000.

### Mia Saigon

This hotel on the Saigon River gives you a chance to explore the artsy District 2, or else just unwind in pampered style. With strong French Indochine vibes, Mia Saigon fosters a nostalgic atmosphere, helped along by its tranquil riverside setting. Calm-inducing treatments and wellness offerings at Ô The Spa further facilitate an indulgently reposeful stay. [miasaigon.com](http://miasaigon.com); doubles from VND3,024,000.

### Ancient Hue Garden Houses

These five gorgeously furnished period garden homes each pay tribute to Hue's storied past. Set in landscaped gardens, the setting is utterly blissful—and convenient to the Perfume River, citadel and other historic monuments. [ancienthue.com.vn](http://ancienthue.com.vn); doubles from VND6,730,000.

—CONNLA STOKES >>





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/ THE BEST OF 2019 /

# MANILA FLAVOR



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Southbank Café and Lounge; The Den at Makati Shangri-La; Metronome's Art Deco vibes; La Picara; minimalism at Sensei.



**THEY SAY YOU** eat first with your eyes—and in the case of Manila's hottest new dining dens, the adage was never truer. Bold interiors add the magic ingredient, from Art Deco and golden glitz to industrial chic and vintage vibes. As pleasing to the palate as they are to the eye, these are the Philippine capital's most dazzling new restaurants and bars.

## Metronome

High ceilings, Art Deco glamour and plush velour banquettes set the stage for French "bistronomie" dishes made with luxe ingredients. Don't miss Robuchon-trained Chef Miko Calo's uni pasta with *ikura* or her more-butter-than-potato mash that's as velvety as the bar stools. [restaurantmetronome.com](http://restaurantmetronome.com); dinner for two from P4,000.

## La Picara

A tropical take on Spanish flavor best describes both the food and the interiors of this tapas joint. Vibrant walls adorned with birds of paradise, patterned tiles and natural wood make this a fun place for sundowner sangrias paired with modern Latin and Filipino-inspired bites. [lapicara.ph](http://lapicara.ph); dinner and drinks for two from P2,500.

## Osteria Daniele

The curved bar surrounded by mosaic tiles makes for a perfect spot for an Aperol Spritz. Tall, arched windows and an Art Nouveau-inspired stained-glass feature gives a cathedral feel to this Italian rendezvous. Make sure to thoroughly honor thy carbs in the temple where copious pasta dishes reign—the *tortelli di zucca* is fab. [fb.com/](http://fb.com/)

*osteriadaniele*; dinner and drinks for two from P2,500.

## Sensei

Just a few meters away from his beloved Mecha Uma *omakase* spot, ultra-talented chef Bruce Ricketts has re-opened Sensei with a fresh new look and menu. Minimalist interiors act as a perfect backdrop to the expertly made sushi and modern Japanese dishes. [fb.com/senseiph](http://fb.com/senseiph); food and drinks for two from P1,500.

## Southbank Café and Lounge

With its polished cement, dark walls, warm wood and geometric accents, this craft coffee joint embodies the paradox of industrial warmth. Enjoy hearty dishes such as a BBQ pulled-pork eggs Benedict or come from 7 a.m.

for brunch and a cappuccino. [southbankcafelounge.com](http://southbankcafelounge.com); breakfast for two from P1,500.

## The Spirits Library

Living up to its athenaeum name, vintage lighting and forged-iron details make this bar feel like an academic haunt. Behind the bar is an impressive display of rare bottles that offer to elevate your IQ—inebriation quotient. [fb.com/thespiritslibrary](http://fb.com/thespiritslibrary); drinks for two from P1,000.

## The Den

Step into the world of a modern Suzie Wong in this red-lit, opium den-inspired speakeasy. Cocktails read like ancient Chinese elixirs: Violet Lotus, Opi-Yum. Find it at Shang Palace inside Makati Shangri-La. 63-2/8814-2580; cocktails for two from P1,000. —STEPHANIE ZUBIRI 🍸

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF SOUTHBANK CAFE AND LOUNGE; COURTESY OF THE DEN; COURTESY OF METRONOME; COURTESY OF LA PICARA; COURTESY OF SENSEI





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# T+L READER SPECIALS

Take a fun family holiday or escape on a solo sojourn—this month's deals give you ample options, with brand-new beach resorts, idyllic archipelagoes and ultra-luxe urban abodes.



Royal beachfront residence, InterContinental Maamunagau.

## BEACH

### MALDIVES

#### InterContinental Maamunagau, Maldives

This new resort in the remote Raa Atoll delivers a pristine Maldivian experience close to UNESCO-protected Baa Atoll and the manta-ray antics of Hanifaru Bay. A stay here comes with InterContinental Club benefits for all guests, including daily breakfast, afternoon tea, evening canapés and all-day refreshments. For extra perks, stay three nights and get 50 percent off return seaplane transfers, or stay five nights and receive free seaplane transfers and daily dinner for two at Café Umi.

**The Deal** Island Indulgence rates start from US\$756.20 per night, valid until June 20, 2020. *ihg.com*.

### THAILAND

#### JW Marriott Khao Lak

Positioned on a long stretch of Andaman-lapped white-sand beach, JW Marriott Khao Lak offers an idyllic coastal getaway just north of Phuket. This beach break package includes daily lunch and dinner for two, daily breakfast for two adults and two kids under 12, airport pick-up, two 45-minute spa treatments, buy-one-get-one on additional à la carte spa treatments, and complimentary WiFi. Additionally, kids under 12 sleep free using existing beds. **The Deal** Return to Paradise starts from Bt4,950 per night, valid until September 30, 2020. Use promo code F00 when booking. *marriott.com*.

## FAMILY

### MALAYSIA

#### Shangri-La Rasa Ria Resort & Spa, Kota Kinabalu

Spend the school holidays exploring Borneo with this family-friendly half-board package where kids stay and eat for free. Get daily breakfast and dinner for two adults and



## SUPERSAVER

#### Avani+ Luang Prabang

Located in the laid-back UNESCO-listed Luang Prabang, this Avani+ puts you in the perfect position for Mekong meanderings and explorations around the ancient city. Stay at least two nights and get daily breakfast, a signature cocktail or mocktail, a complimentary upgrade, 4 p.m. checkout when available, and 20 percent off dining at the hotel. **The Deal** Mini Breaks Special rates start from US\$201 per night. *avanihotels.com*.



two children under 12, a one-hour bicycle ride for the adults, entry for two children to the resort's Adventure Point activity and exploration area, and admission to the Cool Zone kids' club for two children between five and 12 years of age. **The Deal** The Family Fun package starts from RM845 per night, valid until June 30, 2020. [shangri-la.com](http://shangri-la.com).

## BURMA

### Rosewood Yangon

Enjoy a luxurious riverfront stay at this new Rosewood, with extras for the whole family. Spend two nights in the residential-feel hotel and receive A Sense of Place amenities, *longyi* and *htamein* sarongs, daily breakfast, afternoon tea, cocktails and kids' mocktails at Y Bar, a candle-lighting ceremony at Shwedagon Pagoda, family dinner at NOVA restaurant, a puppet show at Htwe Oo Myanmar Puppet Theater, a dessert workshop, and a shopping trip. **The Deal** Family Time starts from US\$1,790 for two nights, two parents and two kids, valid until March 31, 2020. [rosewoodhotels.com](http://rosewoodhotels.com).

## WELLNESS

### CAMBODIA

### Alila Villas Koh Russey

Start 2020 fresh with a rejuvenative stay on the tropical shores of Koh Russey in the Gulf of Thailand. Alila Villas is offering wellness deals for two and five nights that include snorkeling and plankton activities for two, a 60-minute spa treatment and a 60-minute yoga session. Guests staying in a two- or four-bedroom villa also enjoy complimentary wellness minibar daily. **The Deal** Wellness Getaway packages start from US\$1,350 per night, valid until further notice. [alilahotels.com](http://alilahotels.com).

## ROMANCE

### INDONESIA

### Amankila, Bali

Stay ensconced in romance on Bali's dreamy eastern shores. Stay four nights or more in your own cliff-side thatched-roof suite and receive a host of couple's extras like a two-hour cruise, a 60-minute Amankila massage, a bottle of Bollinger, a private sunset picnic, a *melukat* water blessing, daily breakfast, and return airport transfers. **The Deal** The Amankila Romance package starts from US\$580 per night, valid until March 31, 2020. [aman.com](http://aman.com).

## CITY

### THAILAND

### Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok

This 143-year-old grand dame on the Chao Phraya riverside has just unveiled lavish updates with freshly renovated rooms and suites in the River Wing, three refurbished dining venues and a new Japanese *kaiseki* restaurant, Kinu.

As part of a limited-time re-opening deal, guests staying in the new-look wing enjoy personal butler service, daily buffet breakfast for two at The Verandah, and a daily spa credit of Bt2,000 for rooms or Bt4,000 for suites.

**The Deal** Be the First to Stay starts from Bt25,350 per night, valid until March 2020. [mandarinoriental.com](http://mandarinoriental.com).

## SAIGON

### The Reverie, Saigon

Gain a new perspective on Saigon with a package that includes two exciting city tours. See the sights from a two-hour sunset river cruise, complete with gourmet picnic hamper, butler service and chilled Taittinger, then tour the city's vibrant street life with an after-dark vintage Vespa tour, chauffeur-driven so you can relax and enjoy the ride. This three-night package includes your choice of the hotel's Italian-designed rooms and suites, all transfers in a luxury vehicle, access to the hotel's

Reverie Lounge, and daily complimentary minibar and Wi-Fi. **The Deal** Cruising Saigon starts from US\$1,152, valid until further notice. [thereveriesaiagon.com](http://thereveriesaiagon.com).

## SINGAPORE

### The Fullerton Bay Hotel, Singapore

Lunar New Year falls on January 25, 2020 and The Fullerton Bay Hotel has a special celebratory package. Stay during the month of January and receive a pair of Lunar New Year Fullerton Bear plushies, red envelopes for gifting, a dining credit of S\$50 per stay, and daily buffet breakfast for two. Book direct with the hotel and you'll also receive a Merlion cocktail, an exclusive spa offer, free Wi-Fi, and complimentary heritage tours—and, if you're staying in a suite, a complimentary departure transfer. **The Deal** The Lunar New Year Package starts from S\$417 per night, valid until January 31, 2020. [fullertonhotels.com](http://fullertonhotels.com).



Riverside views at Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok.



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AMID A SWIRL OF BAD ENVIRONMENTAL  
NEWS, THERE'S A BRIGHT SPOT FOR CORAL  
IN NORTHWEST AUSTRALIA. BOARD A LUXURY  
CRUISE BOUND FOR THE THRIVING

## ROWLEY SHOALS

P. 78

IT'S EASY TO FIND COMMON GROUND  
IN THE CAPITAL OF A DIVIDED COUNTRY.  
JUST DIVE INTO THE NEW FOOD, DRINK,  
HOTEL AND CULTURE SCENE IN DYNAMIC

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

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FOCUS ON YOUR BREATHING,  
PERFORM ABLUTIONS, AND  
DON'T FORGET YOUR DAILY  
MASSAGE. NEW SPA RETREATS  
BRING FUN TO

## WELLNESS

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WAIT, WHERE? THERE'S  
COMMUNITY, VIBRANCE AND  
UNSPOILED NATURAL BEAUTY  
BEYOND BELIEF IN THE TINY  
AFRICAN ISLAND NATION OF

## SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

P. 112



One of the native  
rusa deer at  
Amanwana,  
page 90.



# Where Coral is King

IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA, THE LITTLE-KNOWN ATOLLS OF THE ROWLEY SHOALS HAVE NOT ONLY SOMEHOW ESCAPED CORAL BLEACHING, BUT ARE THRIVING IN DEFIANCE OF GLOBAL TRENDS. MARINE BIOLOGIST **CAROLYN BEASLEY** TAKES A CHUMMY LUXURY CRUISE AND DISCOVERS THIS SECRET UNDERWATER WONDERLAND WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HER FRIENDS.



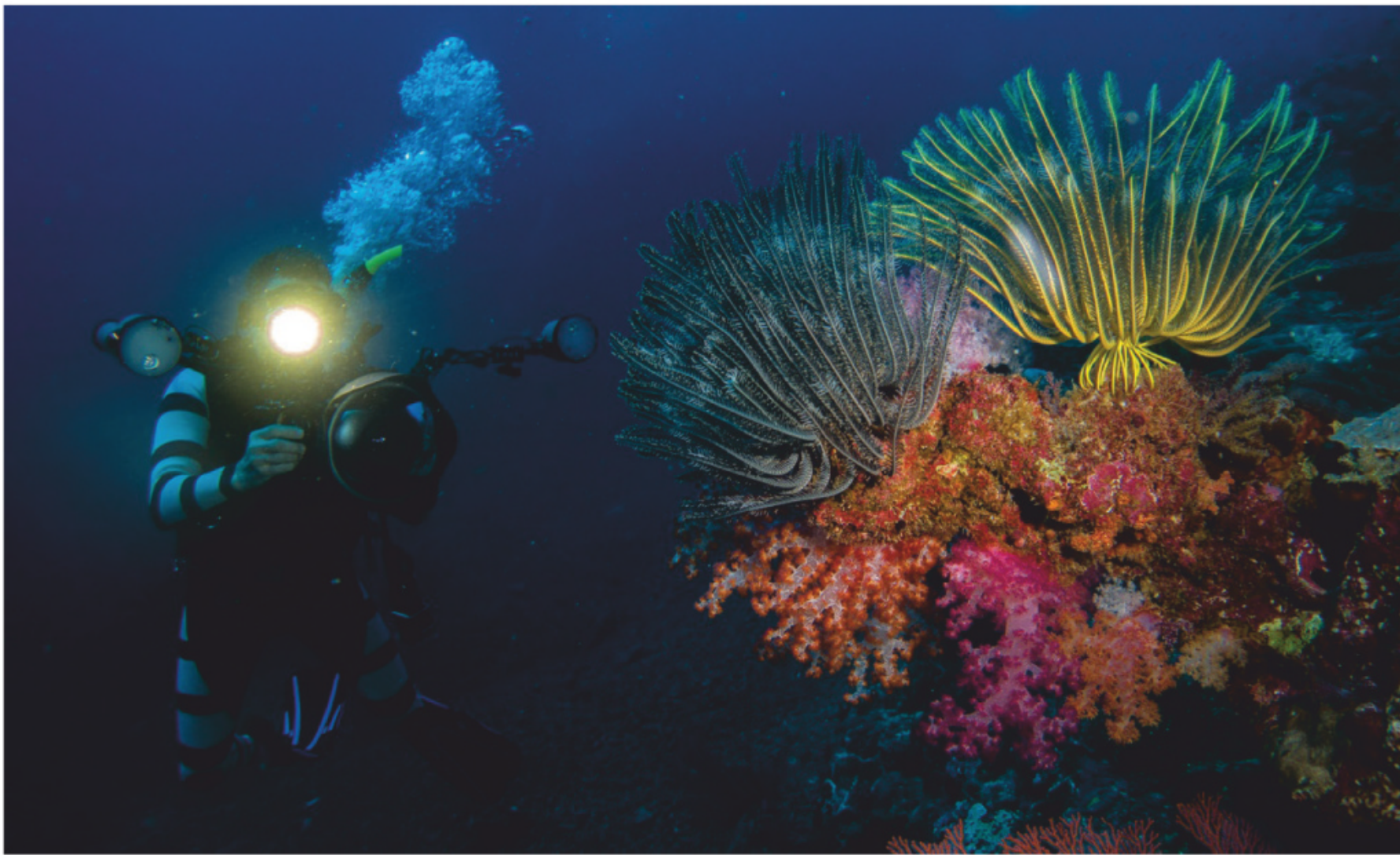












**S**LOWLY FINNING along the edge of the reef drop-off, I see corals in hundreds of varieties covering every plot of real estate, and I'm overwhelmed by the pulsating life. Tabletop corals hide shy fish below, and boulder corals, eight meters across, shelter coral trout big enough to feed my extended family. Tiny baby reef fish dart inside the protective arms of a branching staghorn coral, while bright red fan corals filter the passing currents for tasty plankton morsels.

Out in the deeper waters, the reef drops hundreds of meters to the sea floor. Harmless whitetip reef sharks rest in small caves, and mysterious garden eels protrude from sandy areas like fingers, retracting as I approach. Predators like barracuda and tuna loiter, seemingly surprised to see us, while a young manta ray banks around us for an inspection. My eyes almost pop out of my mask when I behold the fastest fish in the sea: the mighty sail fish with its sword-like bill, cruising slowly near the surface.

I'm scuba diving at the Rowley Shoals, a series of three atoll reefs, 300 kilometers west of Broome in the north of Western Australia. The reefs are intensely alive at all levels of the food chain, and buzzing with the sheer diversity of life they support. They're among the healthiest reefs I've ever seen and, unlike so many others, show no signs of the dreaded coral bleaching.

**FROM TOP:** Feather stars and soft corals flourish here; Bedwell Island—a good spot for a beach picnic. **OPPOSITE:** Captain Gavin maneuvers through a channel.











Humpback whales can be seen—and heard—in the Shoals. OPPOSITE: Unique marine conditions spared the Shoals' corals from bleaching.





The Rowley Shoals are 12 hours by boat from Western Australia's Kimberley coast, remote in anyone's language, and fewer than 300 people per year are lucky enough to visit. I've joined the five-night Coral Atoll Cruise with the pioneer of luxury-expedition sailing in the Kimberley, True North Adventure Cruises, to experience this remote wilderness in style—and to find out the reefs' secret to good health and long life. Following a particularly severe worldwide bleaching event in 2016, the Rowley Shoals were among the only reefs to show no negative impacts. In fact, the area managed to increase its coral cover by one percent, and now supports the most coral cover since records began 22 years earlier. It's a remarkable, and wondrously beautiful, blip of optimism amid what seems like an ever-more depressing environmental news cycle.

**AFTER STEAMING** overnight from the mainland, I wake with a view of Clerke Reef, the middle of the Rowley's three atolls, a 15-kilometer-long reef encircling a brilliant turquoise lagoon. The *True North* was built with a shallow 2.2-meter draft in order to access areas that other boats cannot, and on this first morning I see this design element in action. Entry to the calm lagoon is via a 15-meter-wide channel through the reef, and Captain Gavin Graham uses his 15 years' experience onboard to shimmy the 50-meter boat through the shallow channel without scraping the precious coral.

Inside, the *True North* has 18 stylish staterooms with king or twin beds for a maximum of 36 guests, with 22 staff to cater to their every need. Passengers can recline in the lounge and library, rehydrate at the cocktail bar, or catch some rays on the sundecks. The relaxed atmosphere onboard means staff interact with guests and even join activities as their duties allow. The staff often become friends, and this, I find out, is one reason that more than half of the guests on this trip are repeats.

I chat with Sharon and Ed Freriks from Sydney, who are on their sixth *True North* cruise and keep coming back for the adventurous destinations and capable crew. At dinner, Ed receives the daily fishing award—the coveted “fish hat”—and amid the cheering, Ed claims



# As wonderful as the boat is, the real luxury here is the unlimited access to a rare ocean wilderness

that he is not usually an angler. “But True North,” he says, “they always get me out fishing and they always look after me.”

Another reason to return is the fine cuisine prepared by our two chefs, Zaki and Gavin. We devour treats such as lamb on kohlrabi puree with Japanese spices, Moroccan goat cutlets, and, direct from the Indian Ocean to the dining room, freshly caught tuna sashimi.

As wonderful as the boat is, the real luxury here is the unlimited access to a rare ocean wilderness. Once moored, the *True North* becomes a floating hotel, stationary for three nights as the crew deploys six adventure boats. The high-speed dinghies have comfortable seats and are stocked with drinks. Each day we head out snorkeling, diving or fishing.

These activities are world-class, and this is due largely to the reefs’ sound management. Imperieuse and Clerke Reefs fall within Western Australia’s Rowley Shoals Marine Park, while the third atoll, Mermaid Reef, is a Commonwealth Marine Reserve. The relevant government agencies maintain a sporadic presence at the atolls, and rules are enforced, including restrictions on fishing. During our visit, fisheries inspectors conduct a routine vessel check for illegally caught fish. Other officials are maintaining Clerke Reef’s mooring systems, and Australia’s Border Force surveillance plane passes overhead daily, keeping an eye on international arrivals, including illegal fishing boats.

**REEFS FACE** many threats, and the ship’s naturalist, Dr. Dave Williamson (‘Dr. Dave’ in the boat’s chummy parlance), explains why climate change is such a big one. Corals are made up of tiny animals called polyps. Polyps feed on plankton and supplement their energy with tiny plants, called zooxanthellae, which also give corals their color. High water temperatures, though, lead corals to stress and reject their zooxanthellae; they become unhealthy and turn white. The warmer water might be caused because of the El Nino and La Nina atmospheric interactions, and scientists worldwide observe that with global warming such oceanic conditions are increasing in frequency and severity. “Bleached” corals subjected to warm water for too long die.



FROM TOP: “Dr. Dave” Williamson, the ship’s naturalist; snorkeling the kaleidoscopic Clerke Reef. OPPOSITE: Gourmet dining on board is another delight.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The spacious Explorer Class cabin offers ocean views; the *True North* takes guests to remote, untouched reefs; Clerke Reef's corals emerge at low tide.



But here, bleaching is conspicuous by its absence, and my observation of the healthy reef is backed by science. In April 2019, scientists from the Australian Institute of Marine Science released a paper on the state of the coral habitats of Western Australia, finding that like most reefs worldwide, many in this region have been affected by coral bleaching to varying degrees, but the Rowley Shoals reefs are among the few spared so far.

The lead author of the paper, Dr. James Gilmour, tells me that coral stress can be caused by a variety of factors—but that also means the right recipe of conditions can help prevent it. The Rowley Shoals are in unpolluted waters on the edge of the continental shelf. Cool, nutrient-rich currents from hundreds of meters below help feed the reef and reduce temperatures. The Rowley Shoals are at a latitude where they escape the worst of both El Nino and La Nina, Gilmour says. “In these severe El Nino years, the Rowley Shoals sits on the edge of that blob of hot water. Extreme La Nina events also bring hot water to some of Western Australia’s more southern reefs, and the Rowley Shoals sits somewhere north of that.”

While cyclones cause natural coral damage and regrowth at the Rowley Shoals, there was one well-timed cyclone that actually proved fortuitous for reefs here. “Cyclone Stan dropped air temperatures by a couple of degrees in the 2016 bleaching event and this would have dropped water temperatures, too,” Gilmour says. “My concern is that as temperatures continue to rise, if a cyclone is not over the Rowley Shoals, even though it’s on the edges of the worst conditions, it may still be affected.”

I’m taking in as much healthy reef as possible, joining Dr. Dave and the snorkelers in the real-life aquarium of the shallow lagoon, encountering a leopard shark, angelfish and clownfish to my sheer delight. As we return to the *True North* in our Zodiac, graceful spinner dolphins joyfully ride our bow wave.

WITH CATCH-AND-RELEASE fishing stories involving sailfish, wahoo and tuna being bandied around at dinner, I decide I should give it a try. When a Spanish mackerel hits my lure, my 21-year-old guide, Raff, is right there to help me land it. After obligatory photos, Raff expertly unhooks the fish, setting it free.

# We shoot through the coral passageway, flying over fish, sharks and giant clams, to be spat out into the ocean





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For a change of scenery, we visit the sandy speck known as Bedwell Island. The staff have assembled chairs and beach umbrellas, and we arrive to the popping of champagne corks and the proffering of cocktails. Dr. Dave leads a tour to view rare nesting red-tailed tropicbirds and their chicks, and we toast new friends as the sun slides below a deep-blue horizon.

With low passenger numbers, activities on the *True North* are flexible. Snorkeling tours are deferred for whale watching and scuba diving is delayed by opportunistic swimming with a manta ray. Plans for a drift-snorkel through the narrow “dinghy channel” drainage passage from the lagoon are postponed as conditions are too rough, so we snorkel inside the reef while the wind subsides. Finally, with staff escorting us, 19 guests shoot through the coral passageway, flying over fish, sharks and giant clams, to be spat out into the ocean in exhilarated delight.

Bobbing in the sea, I wait to be scooped up by my dinghy and I remember something Captain Gavin had said earlier. He was describing the reef being alive at every level, from the tiniest animals to the largest. “It’s a pinch-me moment,” he said. “The reef here really says something to you.”

On my last evening on a night dive, the reef actually does say something to me. Twenty meters down in the dark, my dive buddy turns to me with wide eyes brightened by torchlight, motioning me to listen. It’s a second before I hear it: a high-pitched haunting melody interspersed with a series of clicks, tingling the hairs on the back of my neck. It’s a male humpback whale, singing his love song for the females and, in my mind at least, for the Rowley Shoals too. +

Touring Bedwell Island with Dave Williamson in search of red-tailed tropicbirds.

## A climate-defying underwater wonderland

One of the things that make the Rowley Shoals so special is the lack of crowds, and the only thing that keeps numbers low is the isolation. Being more than 2,000 kilometers away from Western Australia’s capital city, and 300 kilometers from the tiny town of Broome, should keep it pristine for now.

### GETTING THERE

Fly to Perth with **Qantas** ([qantas.com](http://qantas.com)), **Virgin Australia** ([virginaustralia.com](http://virginaustralia.com)), **Cathay Pacific** ([cathaypacific.com](http://cathaypacific.com)), **Singapore Airlines** ([singaporeair.com](http://singaporeair.com)), **Malaysia Airlines** ([malaysiaairlines.com](http://malaysiaairlines.com)) and others. Connect to a domestic flight to Broome on Qantas or Virgin Australia. Staff from True North will meet you at Broome airport and transfer you to their air-conditioned lounge where you’ll await departure.

### CRUISE

**True North** cruises to the Rowley Shoals are seasonal, with itineraries planned to avoid the windiest conditions. The five-night “Coral Atoll Cruise” starts and finishes in Broome, with departures on September 5 and 10, 2020. A new 13-night “Coast and Coral Cruise” embarks in Kununurra, visits the Kimberley coastline and the Rowley Shoals, and finishes

in Broome; departing August 22, 2020.

There are three classes of stateroom on board. On the upper level, the 18-square-meter Explorer Class features a king-sized bed and twin-basin ensuite, panoramic picture windows and a bar fridge. The River Class double is located on the next level down, with a king bed and large windows, while the Ocean Class twin cabins on the lower deck are 12 square meters and feature two portholes. All cabins have in-room entertainment, a satellite phone and satellite Wi-Fi.

[Truenorth.com.au](http://Truenorth.com.au); 61-8/9192-1829; rates for the “Coral Atoll Cruise” start from A\$6,695 per person for the Ocean Class room, while the “Coral and Coast Cruise” starts from A\$22,995; prices include airport transfers, all meals and excursions, but exclude alcohol. — C.B.



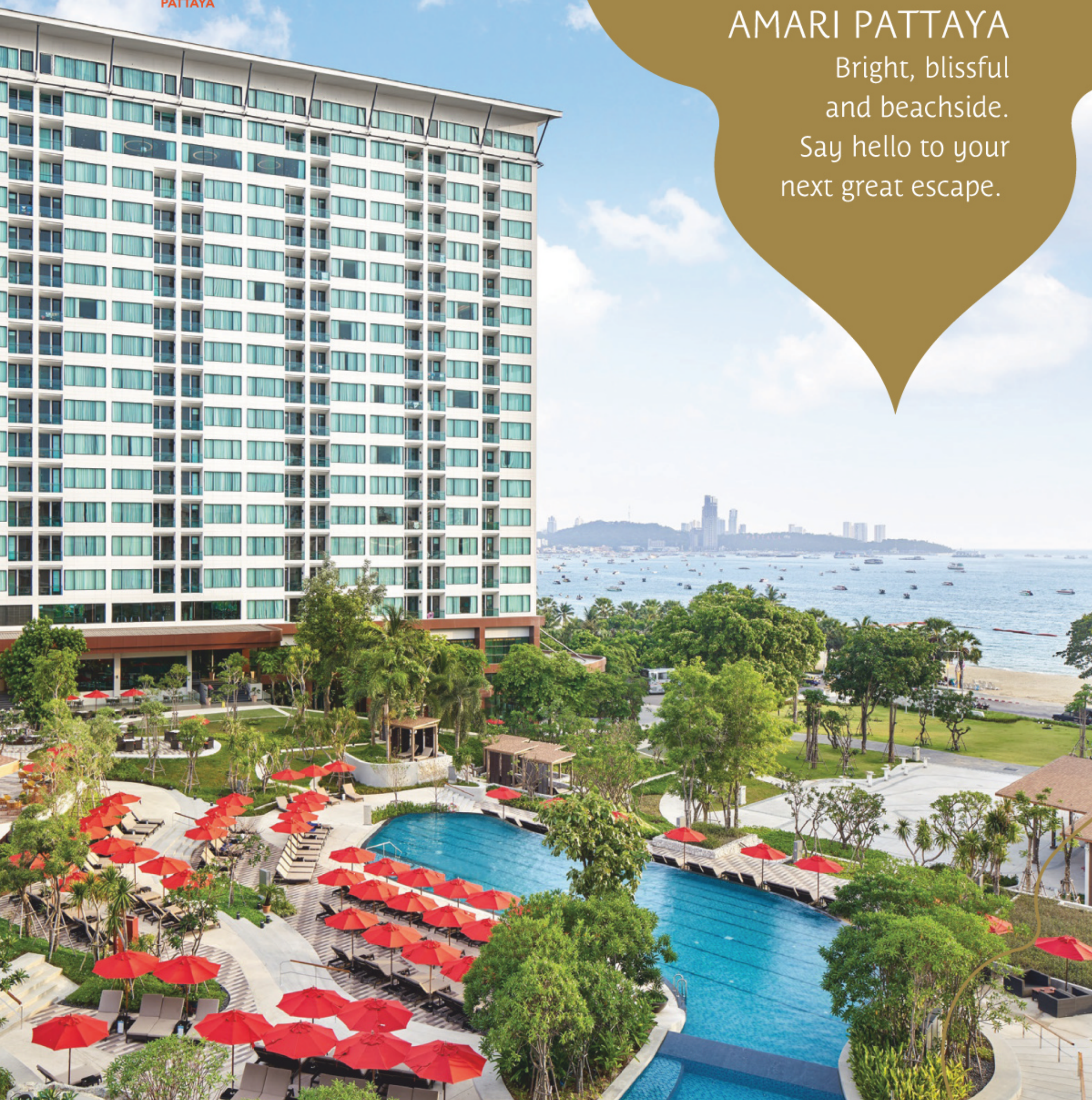
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# Seeking Sanctuary



WHETHER YOU WANT TO PLUNGE INTO SANCTIFIED WATERS OR JUST THE DEPTHS OF YOUR OWN MIND, THESE WELLNESS RETREATS AROUND ASIA ARE AWASH IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-HEALING.







# JUST ADD WATER

A NEW WELLNESS EXPERIENCE BY AMANWANA TEACHES GUESTS AN OLD INDONESIAN STYLE OF MEDITATION, GUIDED BY THE PURIFYING WATERS OF MOYO ISLAND. BY **ELOISE BASUKI**.  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **LEIGH GRIFFITHS**

CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT: The  
pristine Moyo  
Island; serenity in  
spades; drawing on  
the healing energy  
of Matu Jitu;  
Supardan with an  
octopus lure.

**IT'S NORMAL** for meditation sessions to begin with your eyes closed. However mine are squeezed shut, not because I am gearing up to clear my mind, but because I am airborne, clinging white-knuckled to the battered metal door of a very vintage Toyota four-wheel-drive that's careening down a rocky trail, deep in the jungle of Indonesia's Moyo Island.

We are flying over potholes and boulders, ducking every few minutes to avoid the sudden smack of a surprise tree branch, hurtling toward our meditation destination—the sacred Matu Jitu waterfall. Sure, a rollercoaster, butt-bruising car ride doesn't really seem like the typical path to Zen, but stick with me. On Moyo, going off track is all part of the journey.

And anyway, I am in safe hands. I am visiting Amanwana, Jean-Michel Gathy's first architectural project, a pioneering tented camp that has balanced its wild surrounds with 21st-century luxury since it opened back in 1993. An hour's seaplane flight from Bali—a meditative experience in itself, soaring through marshmallow clouds, over the turquoise Flores Sea and, on clear days, past the smoldering Mount Agung volcano—Moyo leaves the crowds far behind, with Amanwana the only resort on the largely jungle-covered island.

In fact, the biggest populations here on Moyo belong to its wildlife. From my roomy, canvas-topped suite—one of 20 that stud a long stretch of sparkly shoreline—it's not unusual to come face to face with the island's





indigenous rusa deer, who live in the adjacent nature reserve, or to hear the footsteps of macaques scrambling on the tent roofs, or to see a reef-shark-versus-mackerel feeding frenzy in the shallows of the beach at dawn.

But it's the resort's ever-evolving wellness menu that has lured me, like many Aman junkies before me, to this far-flung isle. I'm here to try out a new offering led by Balinese spiritual leader and master yogi Pak Amrita Wayan, designed to help guests connect to Mother Nature, and let the island's natural luxuries guide them closer to inner peace.

**YOU CAN'T** have a bad day when Pak Wayan is around," says Marc Bittner, Amanwana's former general manager, before my wild ride to the falls. And it's true; the salt-and-pepper-haired guru is never without a smile. Even in the Toyota, while the rest of us shriek at every little bump, Pak Wayan instead turns to flash his ever-constant ear-to-ear grin at us, putting us instantly at ease. When we finally arrive at Matu Jitu, his smile stretches even wider, and I can tell that we've reached his happy place. Taking a look around, it's no surprise: a seven-

meter cascade thunders into two tiers of jungle-lined, chalky-blue limestone pools. "It feels so untouched," Marc had mused the night before. "You really feel like you're one of the first people there." We're not, though. In fact, these spiritual waters have even been graced by royalty—Princess Diana was one of the first VIP guests at the Amanwana camp.

But I'm not here to fangirl; I'm here to find peace. I think. I'm new to meditation, but have always liked the idea of turning off my monkey mind, forgetting for a few minutes about e-mails and deadlines. I wasn't sure it would be possible, but this seemed a good place to start.

At the base of the falls, Pak Wayan sets up our meditation space: he lights a stick of incense and fills a bowl with water from Matu Jitu, topping it with a jumble of fragrant flowers. "It might look like an offering, but this helps us breathe and interact with nature," Pak Wayan says. We are practicing *kumkum*, derived from the ancient Javanese word meaning "to soak in water." *Kumkum* is often performed underwater, but Matu Jitu is considered too pure and sacred for anyone to swim in—even princesses. So we sit on the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Commanding views from the flight to Moyo Island; one of many forest trails; healthy and hearty cuisine; nature connects with you at Amanwana. OPPOSITE: A calming dip at Amanwana.





One by one we  
follow the master  
into the blue



ground as Pak Wayan guides us with stretches and breathing exercises to let go of our thoughts, and, in turn, our egos.

As we finish up, Pak Wayan uses a large seashell to pour some of the cool Matu Jitu flower water on our heads, for purification and connection to the divine energy. It's a lot to grasp in just one session, but one thing I notice for sure is that the thunder of the waterfall beating down calms me, grounds me. Moyo's natural powers have begun to take effect.

**MOYO TAKES** its name from the Hindu word “*maya*”—the supernatural power wielded by gods and demons to produce illusions. I've heard of the apparitions the local villagers have seen over the years, and Pak Wayan says he has seen angels here. Whether or not you believe this, the island is a fitting setting for nature and spirituality to coexist. One day, I glide over the glassy waters on a paddleboard, admiring a universe of coral and fish below. I go for a snorkel with resident watersports guy, Supardan a.k.a. the octopus whisperer. His title conveys a lofty promise, but, sure enough, as we swim off the resort's beach—past moray eels, waving fan corals and a green sea turtle—Supardan teases a shy little octopus out into the open with a homemade toy. I get emotional watching the octopus reach out for his new, sadly fake, friend.

In the evening we get a natural light show aboard the *Aman XIV*, a traditional wooden outrigger complete with a pillow-top canopy. We snack on popcorn and gaze up at the glowing night sky, wishing upon the many shooting stars that soar above us. Back on land, the ebb and flow of the waves becomes the soundtrack to our beachside dinner, where we feast on locally caught lobster that's so sweet and tender I scoop it straight from the shell, no need for any seasoning.

More traditional wellness experiences come in the form of Indonesian-influenced massages at the beachfront Jungle Cove Spa. I go for the Purifying Ritual, which involves a smoking ceremony using *palo santo* holy wood, which aims to clear stagnant *qi*, stabilize the heart and add some much-needed breathing space to my mind, body and soul.

**BUT THE MOST** Zen experience for me would come after our falls-side session at Matu Jitu. Since the falls are off limits for swimming, Pak Wayan leads us farther into the forest to the smaller Diwu Mbai waterfall. The gentle trickle of water here flows into a deep, dark-blue lagoon, surrounded by shady green ferns, dragonflies darting around bright tropical



flowers. We drop our towels and stand quietly in awe of this picture-perfect paradise.

Suddenly, a squeal breaks the silence as Pak Wayan whips off his T-shirt, throws it on a nearby palm, and jumps into the water. He beckons us in with that beaming grin, and one by one we follow the master into the blue.

The water is cold, so after a few minutes I stretch out on a sunlit rock to let the golden light warm my goose-bumpy skin. As Pak Wayan hands me a young coconut to drink, I ask him how long he has practiced meditation. “I’ve been studying since 1994, but I’ve been practicing since I was a child; I just didn’t know,” he says. “I would go to the forest, to the river, and just enjoy nature. After, I would feel better. I didn’t know then, but I was meditating.”

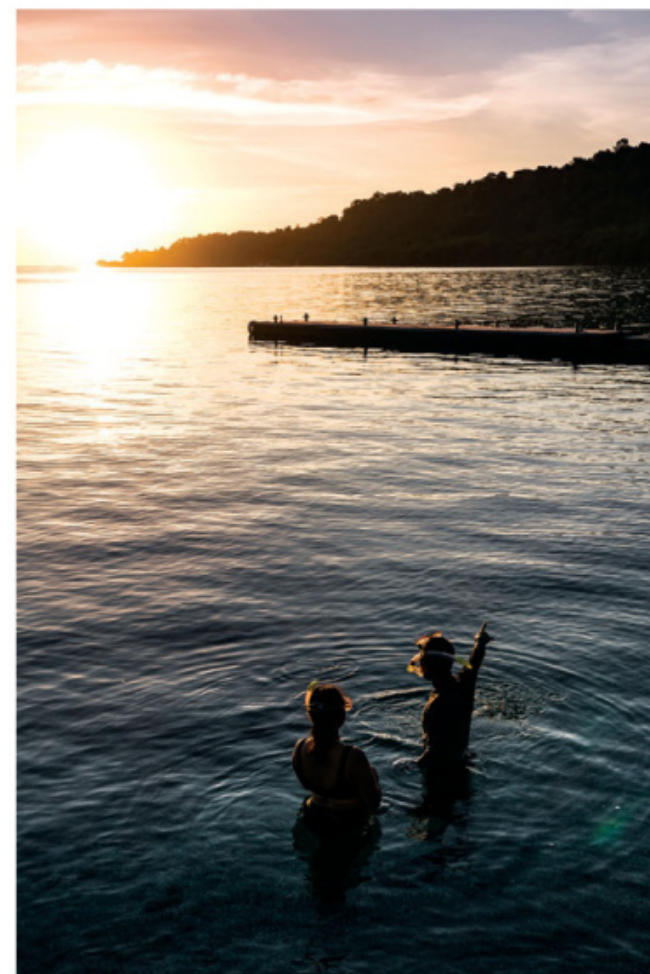
I watch the cascade of water flow across my legs. I see a butterfly try to land on the frangipani nestled in my friend's hair. I notice nature's beauty around me, but I just enjoy it—no thoughts cross my mind. Later, Pak Wayan's teachings finally click. Maybe meditation isn't as complex as I think it is. And maybe I'm not that inexperienced after all.

*aman.com; doubles from US\$800; Pak Wayan is a resident practitioner at Amankila; Amanwana offers a variety of seasonal wellness experiences, so visit the website to find out what is scheduled.*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A scenic arrival experience; water blessings at Matu Jitu; a luxury tent at Amanwana; the end of another day; it's a bumpy open-air ride to Matu Jitu.











# A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

A HOT-SPRING RESORT PLUNGES ANGELA GOH INTO THE MINERAL-RICH WATERS OF CENTRAL VIETNAM.

Hot-spring streams course through Alba Wellness Resort. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Indoor *onsen* baths face the forest; Thanh Tan hot spring has lured locals for centuries.

**ON A COOL MORNING**, I am submerged to chest level in an outdoor thermal mineral stream cloaked in wisps of twirling steam, while kneeling in *vajrasana* yoga pose.

“Water enhances the power of meditation by allowing deeper focus and breathing. Also, the natural therapeutic minerals that soak through the skin nourish and calm body and mind,” says brightly beaming meditation guru and spa manager, I Nyoman Yastama. The water meditation ritual he has curated and is now leading me through is movement therapy: As we inhale (above water) and exhale (under), my meditation becomes more mindful. The process engages the sense of touch, arousing greater awareness of not just the temperature but also of the spring’s higher buoyancy compared to ordinary water. It’s a fascinating twist on meditation, and one you’d be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the world.

That’s because Alba Wellness Resort by Fusion, in a serene valley 30 kilometers northwest of Hue, Vietnam, surrounds a geothermal wellspring of mineral-rich water. Dappled with lakes and ponds, and draped across a chain of mountains, the two-year-old property managed by Vietnam’s home-grown pioneering spa-centered hotel group, Fusion, merges traditional village charm with an air of Zen to create a health retreat without parallel in the country. Anyone who’s visited Vietnam in recent years will recognize the name Alba as a popular brand of native single-source spring-water. It comes from this very place, where savvy locals have been taking to the waters for centuries. It’s the Vietnamese equivalent of Evian-les-Bains.

**LOW-RISE** thatched-roof buildings connected by bamboo-lined paths mingle among a





sprinkling of bright-red bridges arched over a whimsically winding, stone-bordered water channel. This serpentine watercourse hosts leisurely soaking and aqua yoga. When you visit the Japanese-style bathhouse for your pre-spa ritual, you're met with seven different H<sub>2</sub>O-focused sensory indulgences: micro-bubbles, Jacuzzi, steam, sauna, a 12- to 15-degree Celsius cold dip, and indoor-outdoor mineral pools.

It was a good idea to get loose before the spa because, from their list of creative curative treatments, I chose the power-packed Bamboo on the Rocks massage, which uses heated sand-filled bamboo along with hot stones to banish muscle tension. The supremely gratifying face reflexology was a 50-minute take on the mini-massages usually proffered during facials. And color me impressed by the thorough quartet of foot reflexology offerings, spanning deep relaxation, detox, rebalancing and relief for expectant mothers.

For centuries, Thanh Tan hot spring (named after a nearby village) has drawn locals to its warm waters with the promise of healing properties. As word spread, more

people came from afar, including nobility from Hue's citadel and French scientist Albert Sallet, who provided the first formal account of the site in a 1928 article on central Vietnam's geothermal springs.

Continuous geological tests have found a stable and balanced mineral composition—including bicarbonates, calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, sulfate, silicic acid and fluorine—and the water has been bottled for 30-some years. "While living in Phu Quoc, I was hooked as it tastes better than European brands," genuine fan and the resort's general manager Hylton Lipkin told me. "It's cheaper, too." The still mineral water is robust yet refreshing, but I am head over heels for the smoothly balanced bubbly, the fizz remaining where I prefer—in the background. If only it were available outside Vietnam.

It should come as little surprise that it was a pharmacist, Le Thi Chau (who founded Alba's original parent company), who envisioned greater health and hospitality potential for this liquid magic. The eventual name change from Thanh Tan water to Alba, which originates from the Latin word for sunrise, is meant, the





company says, to evoke “a sense of freshness and originality.” Today, the upscale Alba resort and neighboring three-star sister hotel, Thanh Tan Hot Springs by Fusion, comprise Alba Wellness Valley. The resort’s all-inclusive multi-day wellness packages provide a health assesment, *onsen* rituals and spa sessions, activities ranging from the sedate to the adrenaline pumping (jungle walks, ziplining, a high-wire course), and a full-board wellness menu that’s high in nutrition not restriction.

**WHEN FIRST** ushered to one of 20 cottages, I am taken aback—there are no front windows. But inside, cozy, contemporary comfort is all-embracing, clad in earthy-elemental touches of bamboo, wood and stone. And in the morning, I wake to beams of light entering through the wall-to-wall glass in the back of my bungalow, unveiling an unfettered view of a lush garden. That, coupled with the bamboo swing hanging playfully in the bath area, drives home the resort’s ethos: “invite the outdoor in.”

The main restaurant, named after the late Madame Chau, is a two-story, traditional round wooden house towering over a tranquil lotus lake, and serves Hue specialties and classic Vietnamese cuisine. Casual, carefree

drink-and-dine spaces are spread among the open-sided Mori restaurant with international dishes, the Japanese-style Mizu café, and the pool bar, which concocts spirit-soothing smoothie sundowners. Most ingredients served across the property are sourced from Alba’s own organic farm. Fronting a scene that feels the very definition of bucolic—neat plots of luscious vegetables, scampering chickens and ducks minding their business in a tidy enclosure near a fish pond—is an open kitchen where I learn to prepare farm-to-table garden-fresh spring rolls and noodle soup.

Later, a complete sensory workout takes me into the woods. Walking meditation activates the five senses, Nyoman tells me. “And at Alba it’s special because we walk through its citrus-scented jungle strewn with lemon eucalyptus trees.” For added olfactory stimulation, he lines the path with incense sticks. “It is not often that we can find a place that has so much to offer,” Lipkin says, and I have to agree. Alba’s uncommon appeal is re-immersing guests in nature in more ways than one.

*albawellnessvalley.com; three-, five- and seven-day all-inclusive wellness packages from US\$519 per person.*

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Mountains tower over Alba Wellness Valley; an earthy aesthetic infuses the bungalows; an outdoor thermal mineral pool; Madame Chau restaurant.





# TAILOR MADE

WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING FOR FULL DETOX OR JUST A BREAK FROM IT ALL, BANYAN TREE SPA SANCTUARY IS A CHILL RECHARGING STATION WHERE THE ONLY REQUIREMENT IS A DAILY MASSAGE.  
BY JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN

You're welcome to wear PJs all day at Banyan Tree Spa Sanctuary.

**A FEW THINGS** I learned the last time I was in Phuket: I carry my right shoulder higher than my left, causing muscle inflammation; I need to work on equalizing my single-leg balance because when I throw a *teep* (a *muay* Thai push kick) with my left foot I'm 100-percent more likely to lose my balance than when I do it with my right; and an orchestra of a couple dozen frogs makes for the best massage soundtrack you could imagine.

Spa-resort pioneer Banyan Tree just turned 25 and as part of the celebrations, they inaugurated Spa Sanctuary in their Phuket property, one of the island's original five-star beachheads. It's a secluded cluster of 12 pool villas where residents have exclusive access to all the wellness activities and classes they can handle, plus daily complimentary massages or

facials in-room—which, in this case, means the dedicated spa salas on the grounds of your own personal fiefdom.

A look at the daily schedule is borderline overwhelming. There are 50 activities that rotate through. Do I want to work on aligning my posture or stretching my spine? Do I want to go hard-core with power ropes, learn some healthy Thai recipes that are easy to make at home, and wrap up the day with a sleep meditation? How can I schedule everything so that I have plenty of buffer for the buckets of bubbly at breakfast? It's dizzying enough to make you want to just collapse in the sun-loungers outside, or the Jacuzzi beds in the pool, or the actual Jacuzzi next to the pool and wait for their superfoods-packed afternoon tea set to be delivered... or your massage therapist





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Rajesh leads yoga and pilates classes; Spa Sanctuary pool villas float on lotus ponds; a new open-air *muay* Thai ring launches next year.

to show up. Not that that's a problem—your personal wellness concierge is happy to book you a structured, tailored wellness course, or as many or as few individual activities as you like. There's no pressure, no guilt, just an emphasis on mindfulness and the desire for you to optimize your time in whatever way best suits your health needs. It's a broader understanding of a wellness retreat and imparts a fantastic sense of freedom. To wit: one afternoon my friend and I just rode our basket bikes in figure-eights up and down the little hills of the Sanctuary's tree-shaded neighborhood, like my brother and I used to in our cul-de-sac as kids.

All while pedaling, though, I made sure to clench my abs, lengthen my neck and relax my shoulders, as I had been reminded in posture-alignment class. All such seminars are interactive and personalized, and taught by physiotherapists; in this one we worked with foam blocks and exercise bands to relearn how to sit up straight. In "Sole Foundation" class we

dipped our feet in paint and blotted them on white paper like babies on Mother's Day to see where we carried our weight. Our mat pilates instructor, Rajesh, took no prisoners, and wasn't about to let anyone off the hook just because they were on vacation. He seemed fully invested in his guests getting tangible benefits from this program, not just offering taster classes dumbed down to the lowest-level student. *Muay* Thai instructor Em, a former professional boxer, was great at reading the room, tailoring each person's sparring to their skill and fitness level. When we took a private class with him outside by the spa pool, we silenced a rapt audience of toddlers en route to the kids' club. A real, open-air *muay* Thai ring is being built on the property and set to launch first quarter of 2020.

The villas are charming, of the old Lanna style (admittedly a bit dated, but the host of perks more than counters any aesthetic quibbles), with a covered porch for daybeds—a great place to partake of your included >>

COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE (3)





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# DISCOVER BEACHFRONT

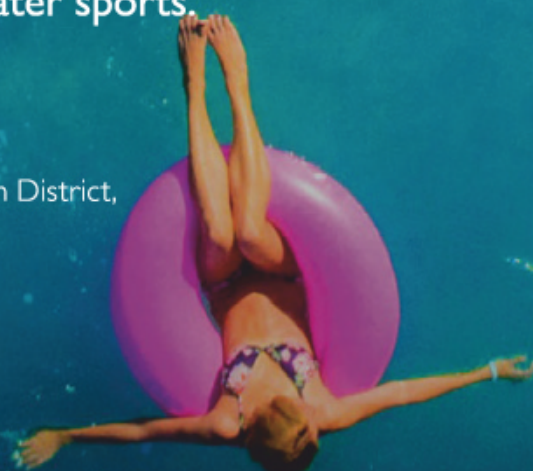
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Tool around on bikes with baskets.

in-room breakfast—facing the 11.5-meter-long pool, above which towers the open-air spa sala, a flight up, and beyond that a lily pad-filled lagoon. With the living room monopolizing the hero shots fronting the vast yard and pool, the bedroom is hidden in the back, a floorplan I found puzzling until I opened the door. The bed floats on a platform, has no headboard, just romantic gossamer drapes, and faces away from the door instead into another garden, which surrounds you on three sides out walls of windows. It makes for an immersively Zen sleeping arrangement. In keeping with the *feng shui* focus on water, the shower is massive and doubles as a steam room, and a stone bath awaits outside.

In-room spa treatments begin with a coriander foot wash (the only place on my body I'm comfortable with that herb, to be honest), after which your therapist leads you up to the elevated sala. Fans and mild incense ward off any concern of bugs, and if you don't want to choose among their playlists of chill music, birdsong during the day and the croaking of frogs at night create a lulling, live 360-degree chorus. Indeed, the sanctuary program makes a strong effort to address all your wellbeing needs, body, mind and heart. Hence the "Evening Dance" option on the activities list. Opt for that and the staff will deliver to your villa a couple of cocktails and an iPad playing slow-dance music, along with a long-stemmed rose. When you're on a trip with your pal, it feels like a funny middle-school slumber-party interlude, but as a catalyst for couple's time, it's an endearingly adorable effort, modern tech facilitating old-school "Wonderful Tonight"—style romance. When the music stops, the frogs'll be happy to take over. +

*banyantree.com; Banyan Tree Spa Sanctuary Phuket villas from Bt22,600 per night.*

## A CHAT WITH SARA BLACK YOGI AND REIKI-HEALING PRACTITIONER

In 2017, photographer Sara Black fractured her hip in an Ironman Relay and turned to yoga to help her heal. She accidentally found herself in a *sattva* yoga course in Rishikesh, India. The experience was life changing and since then she has been dedicated to promoting holistic wellness through her Live Awake Philippines platform and retreats. She tells **Stephanie Zubiri** why it's so important—and easy—to integrate yoga principles into your everyday.

### Why did you choose *sattva*?

I actually had no idea what *sattva* was; I thought I was attending a *vinyasa* yoga course! It was only when I got there that I realized that this is far and beyond what I could ever dream.

*Sattva* yoga is a highly integrated practice of *kriya*, mantra, meditation, *asana*. There is a variety of techniques that we use to cut through the fog of the mind, cultivating a clear energy that brings us closer to truth and our life purpose. Our guru Anand Mehrotra is of the Himalayan Yog-Vedantic lineage. The teachings are authentic and close to the source, while making it accessible to the modern person. Yoga is not for gurus living in a cave: it is for you and for me and every living person who values love and evolution.

### What can people gain from practicing yoga and meditation?

A deeper connection to self, freedom from doubt and fear, easily connecting to source energy, an experience of abundance which fuels what you were put on earth to do, heightened empathy and compassion, a life of joy and bliss.

### People are often daunted by the idea of meditation. What are some tips you have for them?

It all begins with your genuine desire to build awareness. When

we meditate daily, we find that mindfulness is a natural fruit of that. But the simplest and most accessible way to begin living mindfully is to be present in the moment. Acknowledging that the now is the most important moment you will ever have. Acting in the now and having gratitude for the now.

The only thing that is holding you back to begin meditating is your mind. Your soul actually wants to return home to stillness and silence—it finds comfort there. You have a tool that you can use right now to bring you closer to this space: the breath. Sit still for three to five minutes a day just tuning into the breath. With commitment, those minutes soon expand.

We are never taught as children how to care for our mental health. But it's just like brushing your teeth: if you don't brush for one week, imagine how stagnant your mouth would be. Meditation is a daily practice that allows us to clear the stagnant energy to make room for the new to flow through.

### Why do you believe people should take the time for a retreat?

Modern life is so busy. When do we have time to purposefully consider where our life is going? We often get frustrated—why is my life not headed in the direction I want it to? Take time for silence and all the answers will be revealed. It is so helpful to do this pause in a space that is conducive to creating clarity. On retreat, I am your guide, but you will do all the inner work. My dream as a teacher is to become obsolete, having my students come into more self-mastery, creating the life they envision for themselves.

*Sara Black's Instagram: @seethelight, bethelight and @liveawakeph; her next retreat, "New Year, New You Retreat," is January 10–12, 2020, at The Farm at San Benito (thefarmatsanbenito.com), for P28,888 all-inclusive.*



FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE; COURTESY OF SARA BLACK





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ON



D.C.



It's not just the antics of politicians that have trained the world's attention on the American capital. It's also the city itself, and the way it seems to have transformed so quickly as to become almost unrecognizable. But even as longtime denizens lament the loss of the old haunts, a host of entrepreneurs is busy dreaming up the new neighborhood classics. **LILLIAN LI** heads inside the Beltway to explore the Washington that was, and the Washington that will be.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY **MACKENZIE STROH**



CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT: The  
National Museum  
of African  
American History  
& Culture; near  
Meridian Hill Park,  
in Adams Morgan;  
Brothers and  
Sisters restaurant,  
at The Line DC.



T

**HE SMELL OF FISH SAUCE**, pungent and tantalizing, greeted me as soon as I walked through the door of Thip Khao, the first Laotian restaurant in Washington, D.C. I'd taken a leisurely stroll from my hotel in homey Adams Morgan to this four-year-old restaurant in the historically diverse neighborhood of Columbia Heights. My first meal in the District would be family-style in more ways than one: I was to dine with the

chefs and co-owners, Seng Luangrath, who came to the United States as a refugee from Laos in her teens, and Bobby Pradachith, Luangrath's American-born son.

The plates came out in rapid succession: plump and juicy *piing hua jai kai*, grilled chicken hearts that slid off their skewers with just the slightest sticky resistance; ingenious *muu som*, pork belly cured with fermented rice, which gave the meat a tangy bite. When I brashly claimed to love spicy food, the chefs passed me a plate of *tam muk houngh phet phet*, a papaya salad with a scattering of peppers peeking through the pale strands. A moment after my first bite, the heat hit me—the peppers were bird's-eye chilies. My forehead broke out in a sweat and I clutched the sticky rice in my hand like a stress ball. My companions laughed good-naturedly at the look on my face.

Not so long ago, it would have seemed impossible for one of D.C.'s most talked-about restaurants to be located in Columbia Heights. But now the neighborhood's 11th Street corridor, once lined with vacant storefronts, is a destination for restaurants and nightlife. High-rise condos have sprouted among the quiet row houses. And the very existence of a Laotian restaurant in D.C. reflects the evolving tastes and desires of the city's residents. Chef Luangrath found herself serving so many residents of D.C. proper at her popular first restaurant, Bangkok Golden, in Falls Church, Virginia—an outpost of a Thai chain she took over and later renamed Paedek—that she finally decided to bring her cooking to where they lived.

Since 2009, D.C.'s population has grown by more than 100,000. Last year it surpassed 700,000 for the first time since 1975, the year the funk band Parliament came out with "Chocolate City," its legendary ode to D.C.'s resilient African-American population. From the 1950s until the 2010 census, Washington, D.C., was a majority-black city, but that's changed with the recent influx, which has been predominantly white. Led by millennials, who now make up more than one-third of the population, the newcomers have brought energy and money to once-quiet residential areas like Shaw and Petworth and streets like 14th and U.



D.C.'s new demographics, ironically, are tied in part to excitement over the country's first black president, who brought idealistic young people to national politics. Meanwhile, the recession that was under way when Obama took office lured transplants from pricier coastal capitals. Developers followed the money. In 2008, Columbia Heights got D.C. USA, the largest development in the city. That same year, local government approved financing for what would become a US\$2.5 billion deal to overhaul the Southwest Waterfront into the Wharf, a shiny new playground on a channel off the Potomac with a concert venue, three hotels and dozens of restaurants. Farther east, along the Anacostia River, is D.C.'s fastest-growing neighborhood, the Navy Yard, and a spiffy new park, the Yards, with a pedestrian bridge over the river.

All this has been great for travelers. There are new cultural attractions, like the National Museum of African American History & Culture and the newly expanded International Spy Museum, tony hotels, and more delicious things to eat than ever before, giving visitors options far beyond the 10-block radius around the National Mall, which used to be where you went when you went to D.C. But this kind of wholesale reinvention has introduced a particularly vivid version of the same problem many American urban centers have been grappling with: How does a city allow for progress without pushing out the very people who've made it what it is? How do you create room for the future without losing the past?





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: The Line DC, in Adams Morgan; the Hometown newsstand at the downtown hotel Eaton DC; a salad at the Filipino restaurant Bad Saint; Genevieve Villamora (left), owner of the Columbia Heights restaurant Bad Saint, dines there with a friend.



**THOUGH I GREW** up half an hour outside D.C., in Montgomery County, Maryland, I witnessed none of these developments firsthand. My hometown is technically inside the Beltway—which refers to the ring that Interstate 495 makes around the District and its suburbs in Maryland and Virginia—but the only D.C. thing about me is my mobile phone’s 202 area code. As I embarked on my week in the capital, I carried with me a specific strain of anxiety that is familiar to any kid from the suburbs heading into the big city.

When my cab pulled up to The Line DC, in Adams Morgan, Ficra, my driver, and I both stared up at the Neoclassical building standing before us. A wide set of stairs, the kind a little kid who’s just seen *Rocky* for the first time would want to run up, led to six massive sandstone pillars that sandwiched the hotel’s doors. As I climbed them, Ficra hesitated at the curb, wanting to make sure I’d come to the right place.

Despite the imposing façade, the two-year-old hotel is meant to be a neighborhood spot. Formerly the First Church of Christ, Scientist, it was built in 1912 and had been vacant since the early 90s. Developer Sydell Group kept more than just the face of the church—there are refurbished pews, hymn boards, and even the old organ, the brass pipes of which now dangle two stories in the air in a large, imposing cube. My room had a stylish if slightly self-conscious warmth, with colorful throw rugs, framed thrift-store ephemera, and an “air-purifying” snake





plant, listed in the guest services binder as an in-room amenity. Its Community Center is a public space that local nonprofits and artists can apply to use.

Jack Inslee, who runs Full Service, the hotel's radio station, emphasized the Line's role in the neighborhood. "That's why we have glass walls when cement ones would be better for sound," he told me, gesturing to the transparent partitions that can be folded back like an accordion. "We want to see the people, and vice versa." As I looked around the lobby at the guests sitting on the dark blue sectionals, in the batik booths, and at the long library tables, I thought that the Line did seem to capture the new D.C. I saw a diversity of race, gender and even age. The only thing that everyone appeared to have in common was that they were all impeccably, expensively dressed.

But there is something else that unites these denizens of the new D.C.: they're hungry. And many of the restaurants that serve them, themselves a diverse lot, strive, like the Line, to be neighborhood places. I had lunch at one, the year-old Green Almond Pantry, a long, narrow, sunlit space in Shaw, a formerly majority-black enclave bordered on the north by Howard University. On my way, I walked past vibrant, freshly painted row houses, many with Sotheby's signs in their front yards.



I had come to meet Genevieve Villamora, the co-owner of Bad Saint, a Filipino restaurant in Columbia Heights. Over a slice of leek-and-hazelnut tart and a meze plate so delicate that it defied my understanding of red peppers, she told me how much the city has changed since she arrived 25 years ago. "I can't walk down a street without thinking about what used to be there," she said as she tore off a piece of focaccia. "And people who came later will never know. Or they'll have their own ghosts to remember."

Villamora is typical of new D.C. entrepreneurs who are redefining the city while striving to ensure that longtime residents still have a place at the table. Her restaurant, which she opened in 2015 in the midst of Columbia Heights' transformation, is known for its long lines and egalitarian hospitality. "We don't want to operate within a bubble, we want to be a part of the neighborhood," she said. Hiring longtime locals, Villamora said, has helped Bad Saint feel rooted even as its national profile has soared. "Many of our customers visit from far-flung corners of the world, but a lot of them are still people we run into at the grocery store or at the corner bar down the street."

The day after I met Villamora, I went to the Wharf. On a Wednesday afternoon, there were few people strolling its waterfront walkway, but I found a cheerful crowd as soon as I entered Officina, chef Nick Stefanelli's three-story Italian marketplace-restaurant-rooftop bar. Like the rest of the Wharf, Officina still has a just-out-of-the-package shine, from the marble counters to the glass case displaying house-made sausages. The olive oil on my *vitello tonnato*, the pasta in my *bigoli all'anatra* (a thick spaghetti with duck sauce), even the torrone gelato in my dessert—which tasted, no joke, the way the cool side of your pillow feels—were all for sale in the market downstairs. Stefanelli told me he had polled D.C.'s Italian community to see which hard-to-find treats he might stock for them. By the time I left, lines of cars were idling in the Wharf's drop-off zones, delivering people in steady droves.

Probably the most famous example of D.C.'s new culinary eclecticism is Maydan, the two-year-old restaurant in Cardozo known for its enormous firepit, where cooks maneuver whole chickens and tenderloins on





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: A Rake's Progress, a restaurant within The Line DC that showcases mid-Atlantic ingredients; the cuisines of the Middle East, North Africa and the Caucasus are the focus at Maydan, in Cardozo; a staffer at Tiki TNT, a tropical-themed bar at the Wharf; the Contemplation Court at the National Museum of African American History & Culture.



the flames. Its menu offers a culinary tour of the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Middle East, with stops in Georgia, Morocco, Lebanon and Turkey. The national food press has raved about Maydan, whose cuisine reflects the twisty translations of a dish from place to place through condiments—seven, to be exact, from garlicky *toum* to spicy *harissa*, all available à la carte and, paired with the grilled meats and veggies, the foundation for infinite flavor combinations. But even though Maydan has become a can't-miss destination for foodies from out of town, at heart it is, like Bad Saint, a place for the community. “We set out to make this a neighborhood restaurant, for the young families in the area,” Gerald Addison, a chef at Maydan and a D.C. native, told me.

I wanted to get a taste of the old places, too, so I went to Vace, a 43-year-old Italian market in Cleveland Park with formidable Italian grandmothers behind the register and US\$2 pizza slices so good you'll sacrifice the roof of your

mouth to eat them hot from the oven. At Don Juan, Mount Pleasant's favorite *pupusería* since 1992, I smothered pork-and-cheese *pupusas* in slaw before scarfing them down, nearly eating the foil wrapping in my haste.

Places like Vace and Don Juan are important not just because they're delicious but also because they represent an older D.C. that's increasingly hard to find. “There used to be go-go music on the street, and places selling chicken and mumbo sauce,” recalled Addison, who moved back to his hometown in 2012. “When I tell people I grew up in D.C., they're surprised. I think they forget that some of us are from here.”

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM** of African American History & Culture, which opened its doors in 2016 after decades of organizing efforts, bears little resemblance to the limestone-white museums lining Constitution Avenue. Standing grandly off on its own on 14th Street, the bronze building rises in an inverted pyramid—designed by British-African architect David Adjaye as a nod to Yoruban crowns—amid a sprawling lawn.

A freight elevator dropped me into the History Galleries, which fill three stories, each with a passageway stretching 1.5 kilometers. The only way to get out is by walking through all three levels. The dim lights of the lowest level (“1400–1877: Slavery and Freedom”) revealed hordes of other guests. Together we shuffled from one exhibit to the next. Moments of horror were juxtaposed with moments of resilience, even pleasure: child-size shackles sat near hand-crafted marbles, and a wall inscribed with descriptions of enslaved people faced an exhibit on musical instruments. The sudden burst of color and music that greeted me at the top level (“1968 and Beyond: A Changing America”) was all the more poignant after the 500 years of darkness below. When I



exited after three hours, I stared at the other museums along the Mall, unable to reconcile the Washington so concerned with America's past with the D.C. that seemed to be struggling to keep its own from disappearing.

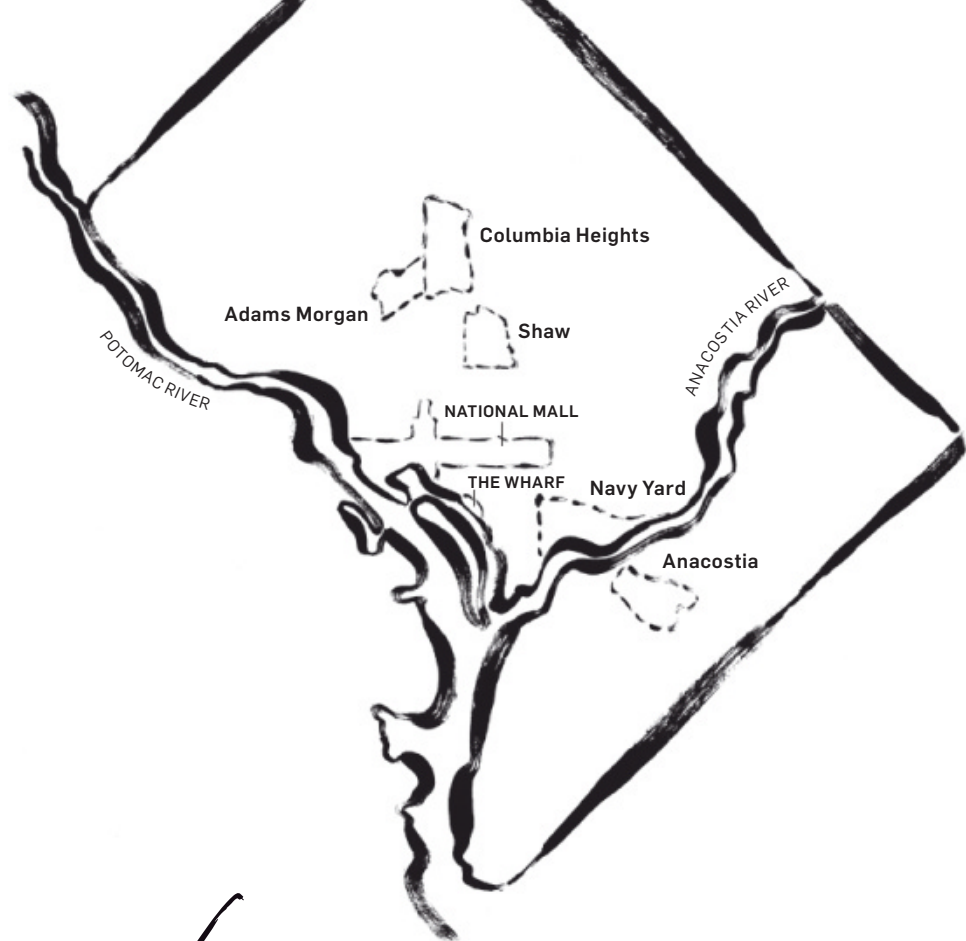
Oddly enough, I didn't start to hear about D.C.'s local history until I checked in to Eaton DC, a new hotel near Franklin Square that, at first glance, seemed fully concerned with the now. There were zeitgeisty touches, such as a co-working space and a bowl of crystals for guests at check-in. My room was stocked with yerba maté shots and kombucha; a plastic-wrapped tarot deck (US\$15); and my very own record player, along with a small selection of vinyl.

Yet despite its trendy vibe, Eaton incorporates nods to the area's past in its décor and programming. On a tour of the hotel's art and artifacts, which guests can sign up for at the front desk, I learned how in 1830, Beverly Snow, a free black man, opened a popular oyster house on the corner of Sixth and Pennsylvania; how the architect William Sidney Pittman constructed the 12th Street YMCA, the first to allow black men, in 1912; and how in 1943 the Barnett-Aden Gallery, one of the first galleries to show African-American art in the U.S., debuted near the Y.

The next morning, I struck up a conversation with Ellery Queen, a barista at Eaton's coffee shop, who grew up between the Wharf and the Navy Yard. When I asked her how she felt about the developments in Southwest D.C., she didn't hesitate. "They're tearing down people's childhoods," she told me. "My family used to go to the wharf all the time. We would buy a cheap bag of crabs from one of the restaurants and just sit and eat them by the water. None of those restaurants exist anymore." Queen is planning on moving to Florida with her two children; D.C. has become too expensive for her. "It's not that change is bad," she said. "But they didn't change with us in mind."

**ON MY LAST DAY** in town, I took the Metro across the Anacostia River. For just a moment, I caught a glimmer of what D.C. might have looked like a couple of generations ago, when it was one of the few places where middle-class African Americans could grow their businesses and raise their families. The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum, an institution with the mission of preserving African-American history through the lens of the Anacostia community, was presenting a free screening of a new documentary called *What Happened 2 Chocolate City*. After the credits rolled, filmmaker Mignotae Kebede told us that she'd moved to D.C. from Los Angeles because she'd grown up listening to her parents tell their friends stories about Chocolate City. She made the film after arriving to discover that that version of D.C. was nowhere to be found.

Kebede's final words were "Talk to your neighbor." She repeated those words when we spoke later, adding, "If you don't talk to the person who's been on your block for decades, you'll never know the history of where you're living." "Talk to your neighbor" rang in my head on my flight home. It was a refrain I'd heard all week—sometimes as an admonishment, sometimes as a goal, always as a way of building a life in this ever-changing city. +



## Washington, D.C.

### How to explore D.C.

Venture beyond the National Mall to see some of the city's most compelling corners.

#### STAY

The **Line DC** ([thelinehotel.com](http://thelinehotel.com); doubles from US\$199), in Adams Morgan, is stylish, with excellent dining (try the "next vacation cake" at Brothers & Sisters). Downtown, **Eaton DC** ([eatonworkshop.com](http://eatonworkshop.com); doubles from US\$199), the brainchild of hotelier Katherine Lo, has rooms stocked with books by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Shirley Chisholm. Other new additions include the 360-room **Conrad** ([conradhotels.com](http://conradhotels.com); doubles from US\$339) and the timelessly elegant **Dupont Circle Hotel** ([thedupontcirclehotel.com](http://thedupontcirclehotel.com); doubles from US\$229).

#### EAT & DRINK

At the Wharf, go to **Officina** ([officinadc.com](http://officinadc.com); mains US\$18–\$68) for Italian fare and **Tiki TNT** ([tikintnt.com](http://tikintnt.com)) for tropical cocktails. Filipino spot **Bad Saint** ([badsaintdc.com](http://badsaintdc.com); mains US\$16–\$40), in Columbia Heights, lives up to the hype, as does **Maydan** ([maydandc.com](http://maydandc.com); mains US\$12–\$48), in Cardozo. Bring a group to nearby **Thip Khao** ([thipkhao.com](http://thipkhao.com); mains US\$12–\$24), for family-style Laotian dishes. For picnic provisions, head to Shaw and stop at both **Green Almond Pantry** ([greenalmondpantry.com](http://greenalmondpantry.com); mains US\$8–\$13) and **Seylou Bakery** ([seylou.com](http://seylou.com)). Try the *pupusas* at **Don Juan** ([donjuanrestaurantdc.com](http://donjuanrestaurantdc.com)), in Mount Pleasant, then walk 1½ kilometers south to Adams Morgan and compare them with those at **El Tamarindo** ([eltamarindodc.com](http://eltamarindodc.com)). **Vace Italian Deli** ([vaceitaliandeli.com](http://vaceitaliandeli.com)), in Cleveland Park, sells slices, subs and other Italian delights, while Park View "Jew-ish" deli **Call Your Mother** ([callyourmotherdeli.com](http://callyourmotherdeli.com)) has inventive bagels and smoked fish even Bubbe would approve.

**SEE & DO**

The museums on the Mall are a must, especially the poignant **National Museum of African American History & Culture** ([nmaahc.si.edu](http://nmaahc.si.edu)). To see the presidential memorials, rent a Citibike and go after dark, when they're empty and lit up against the sky. Other highlights include **Artechouse** ([dc.artechouse.com](http://dc.artechouse.com)), a gallery/light show hybrid near the Wharf; the **Phillips Collection** ([phillipscollection.org](http://phillipscollection.org)), in Dupont Circle; and the Smithsonian's **Anacostia Community Museum** ([anacostia.si.edu](http://anacostia.si.edu)), in Anacostia, which reopens this fall. Try to catch a show at the **9:30 Club** ([930.com](http://930.com)), near the U Street Corridor. Once the heart of D.C. hard-core and go-go, it remains one of the best—and most iconic—venues in the country.





**Switzerland.**

# UPGRADE YOUR WINTER

Zinal, Valais, © Silvano Zeiter

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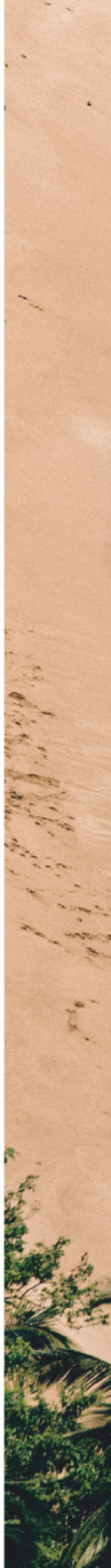




Flowers blossoming on the island of Príncipe, one of the most biodiverse places on the planet. OPPOSITE: The popular Banana Beach, on Príncipe.

THE TINY WEST AFRICAN ISLAND NATION OF  
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE ENSNARES THE  
VISITOR, BOTH WITH ITS UNSPOILED NATURAL  
BEAUTY AND WITH THE HEAVY MEMORIES OF  
ITS COLONIAL PAST. **SOPHY ROBERTS** GOES  
WANDERING THROUGH ITS JUNGLES,  
RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH THE GHOSTS.  
**PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROBBIE LAWRENCE**

pellbound











As THE PLANE tips its wing toward the airstrip, I can see several volcanic towers rising out of the forest, like giant standing stones. The largest, the Pico de Príncipe, dates from when the island of Príncipe was formed, some 31 million years ago. Farther off are flat-topped mountains. The turquoise, jade and storm-blue water is dotted with a few lonely pirogues, the banana-shaped dugout canoes used by traditional fishermen. Around rocky headlands, the water is white with spume from the surge and swell of the Atlantic. The scene is heart-stoppingly cinematic, like something out of *King Kong*.

I like airports where the locals hop into the backs of friends' pickups for their ride home. There is no taxi stand to make use of, just informal solutions to the island's lack of public transport. The terminal is nothing more than a little building in the bush—how I imagine the Caribbean to have been before the jets showed up. The drive to my hotel is a bumpy ride along a red-earth road. On all sides, the African forest canopy reaches up toward the Atlantic light. Orchids tumble out of crevices in the tree trunks.

Príncipe, the little sister in the two-island West African nation of São Tomé and Príncipe, is a lost world. The country, the second smallest in Africa in both area and population, lies in the Gulf of Guinea, roughly 240 kilometers off the northwestern coast of Gabon. The islands are separated by 150 kilometers of water. Most flights in come from Accra, the well-connected, oil-rich capital of Ghana. Then, from the town of São Tomé, the nation's capital, you pick up a second, 35-minute flight to Príncipe. (Traveling by water is not advised; during my visit, one of the local ferries sinks.)

I wouldn't dally on São Tomé: the beaches I saw don't have anything on Príncipe's, and while the old Portuguese colonial buildings are beautiful—and the churches a spectacle of song and prayer during Sunday Mass—they are mostly too dilapidated to be worth lingering for. Príncipe is the prize—a sweat to get to, but a place that's hard to leave.

Gibson, a Príncipean waiter I meet, has no desire ever to step off his island, even to go to São Tomé. Leandro, a basket weaver, happily rolls his tobacco in the pages of a dictionary. The pace of life is so slow it can feel as if this is the still center of our rapidly turning world. In a way, it is. Príncipe is located just a few hundred kilometers east of the intersection of the equator and the prime meridian—the zero lines of latitude and longitude. The island is also emerging as an interesting new frontier in eco-tourism: off the edge of the African continent, with that alluring mix of risk (the challenge of getting there included), unspoiled nature (so abundant, you cannot access half the island because there simply aren't any paths), and some good new hotels that offer real comfort among the wildness.

It is still so undeveloped, in fact, that even the locals can get lost. In the back of the island's fish market, I meet the mother of a boy, nicknamed Tarzan, who disappeared into Príncipe's old-growth forest. He reappeared a year later, having survived on a diet of coconuts and crabs while sleeping on the forest floor.



A prep cook at  
Roça São João, a  
restaurant in a  
restored colonial  
plantation house  
on São Tomé.  
OPPOSITE FROM  
LEFT: The National  
Museum of São  
Tomé and Príncipe;  
the terrace at Roça  
Sundy, a hotel in  
two former  
plantation houses  
on Príncipe; the  
pool at Sundy  
Praia, a resort on  
Príncipe.







A fishermen pulls  
in his nets at  
Mikolo Beach at  
Sundy Praia.  
OPPOSITE FROM  
LEFT: A terrace at  
Sundy Praia;  
breaking open a  
cacao pod; forest  
fruits and garden  
produce at a  
market on  
Príncipe.







In Príncipe's main settlement of Santo António, there are hardly any shops and just one supermarket, a place called Lusocash, which one local I meet calls Lose Your Cash; by the time any provisions get all the way out here, they are prohibitively expensive. Twice a year, a cruise ship might drop into São Tomé, but never Príncipe. The crime rate is so low, there are only 12 policemen, and no prison—only a single holding cell.

"Almost everybody knows each other," says Estrela Matilde, executive director of the Príncipe-based environmental nonprofit Fundação Príncipe. "They more or less police themselves."

Most of the community, which numbers fewer than 9,000 people, are either subsistence farmers or fishermen who will happily fling open their homes to welcome you in for a plate of banana fried in coconut oil or a shot of palm wine. Their stilted huts occupy groves of pineapples, soursops and pepper plants. The smell of ylang-ylang, an essential oil that comes from the cananga tree, is soporific. Most people walk or bike.

Had Charles Darwin stopped here, Príncipe would have told him all he needed to know to develop his theory of evolution. According to the global conservation nonprofit Fauna & Flora International, the island, a UNESCO-protected biosphere reserve, is home to some of the most biodiverse forests in all of Africa, with more endemic species per square kilometer than the Galápagos—or anywhere else. Last year, Matilde tells me, the organization helped to discover a new species of owl.

If Darwin had visited, however, he would also have witnessed human beings' astonishing capacity for cruelty. Though Príncipe is ravishingly beautiful, the island has a dark history. With no indigenous population, it became the place where Portuguese colonizers in the early 16th century brought enslaved Africans to work the

rich volcanic soil for sugarcane and, later, cacao. To entice farmers in Portugal to run plantations and populate the island, the crown offered slave women to anyone who would live here. Príncipe also became the place where slave ships would stop to pick up food and water en route from West Africa to the New World.

Slavery was officially outlawed in 1875, but nearby Cape Verde and Angola soon provided São Tomé and Príncipe with a new source of labor under exploitative contracts, helping the islands become the largest producer of cacao in the world. Still more Cape Verdeans migrated to find work on Príncipe's farms in the 1940s and 50s, when their own country was experiencing famine. After independence, in 1975, São Tomé and Príncipe's fragile economy fell apart, and the *roças*, or plantations, were abandoned, leaving behind laborers who today still occupy the old *senzalas*, or worker houses, on the estates. These crumbling ruins, a palimpsest of Príncipe's colonial history, give the island a haunted feeling.

I'VE COME TO SEE Príncipe's tortured past and optimistic future for myself, drawn by a number of conversations I'd had in the course of my reporting on travel and conservation in Africa. I'd heard that the President of the Regional Government of Príncipe, António José Cassandra—Toza for short—has rejected offers from the big palm-oil companies to plant the cash crop that is destroying so many other equatorial rainforests, from Benin to Borneo. To cut down one of the big trees, you need his



permission. Toza also won't allow construction of any hotel in excess of 50 rooms. Next year, he intends to ban plastic bags. Príncipe, remarkably, is also the only country on the West African coast with coral monitoring.

I'd also heard talk of a mysterious South African philanthropist, Mark Shuttleworth, who has spent more than US\$100 million to create high-end sustainable tourism in the country. Locals refer to Shuttleworth, who in 2002 became the second-ever space tourist, as the Man of the Moon. He is Príncipe's biggest private employer, paying salaries that start at more than double the minimum wage. He is not without his critics. A local complains to me that the hotels have led to property inflation, and increased migration resulting from the work opportunities he has created has put pressure on the island's infrastructure. But he is more responsible than anyone for Príncipe's emergence as a travel destination.

In 2011, Shuttleworth bought Bom Bom, his first hotel in Príncipe, a modest resort on an immodestly beautiful beach. The following year, he acquired a small hotel on São Tomé, Omali, which most visitors use to break up the journey. In June 2017, he opened Roça Sundy, a pair of restored plantation houses in Príncipe's interior, where cacao, coffee, pineapples and bananas are still farmed. Last December, he unveiled his Príncipe flagship: the beachside Sundy Praia, comprising 15 luxury tents hidden in trees along the shoreline, a lively bar, a run of tasteful wooden sun loungers along a three-kilometer beach, and a forest-fringed pool. Given the complexities of hospitality in the Gulf of Guinea, this was no easy feat. "São Tomé is at the end of a logistics chain," explains Chris Taxis, the CEO of Shuttleworth's development company, HBD Príncipe. "In Príncipe, we have to make it up."

A hotel with an old soul and a contemporary polish, Sundy Praia is the perfect place to wash up bone-tired and

in need of a refuge, as I am. I could stay for days, swimming in a balmy sea as flat as a mirror, under a silver moon; eating farm-picked salads under the vaulted ceiling of the enormous dining room; reading in a bird's-nest chair suspended from a tree branch, the forest rustling with parrots. While other beach resorts need umbrellas for shade, Sundy Praia has wide-spreading fig trees. Land crabs scuttle determinedly up and down the sand, leaving trails. There are rich seabird colonies—sooty terns, brown noddies—and healthy whale populations (humpbacks pass through from July to September). Three species of turtles nest on the island's empty beaches. Turtles need to be guided by moonlight, not bar lights, if their breeding is to succeed; they thrive here because no electric illumination muddles their returns to lay eggs.

One evening I meet Toza, the regional president, for a cocktail at Sundy Praia's bar. He is aware that, despite his native island's beauty, its indirect flights and far-flung location are a hurdle to any future development. "When you can go to the Caribbean or Bora Bora, why come to Príncipe?" he says. "We need to stay special, to remain pristine, for people to want to make the effort."

To see what Toza means, I take a boat out to explore the fringes of Obô Natural Park, heading for the Baía das Agulhas, or Bay of Spires. It's called that because the coves are punctured by more of those raw volcanic spikes and arches poking out of the sea. I walk on beaches not even St. Bart's can outperform. One, a comma of white sand called Banana Beach, is seared in my memory from a Bacardi ad that ran on British TV in the 90s. I find its paradise vibe a bit unsettling, not only because I'm encountering such a familiar sight in such an unfamiliar place but also because of its history: from the cliff above Banana Beach, plantation owners used to push slaves to their deaths, or so the story goes.

I walk into a stone building hidden in the forest—a former storehouse, perhaps, or a church. The tree canopy is sliced by shafts of golden light. Raindrops sit caught in the giant waxed leaves like pewter-colored balls. The building is so entangled with vines that it's almost as if it is trying to disappear. The roof has fallen in. Roots drip over the broken walls. Palms burst like giant shuttlecocks from the loamy floor. Through a narrow arch, I catch a glimpse of a woman in white: she is making her way along the shore, the edge of her world marked with a thread of surf. I feel like I have seen a ghost.







The footbridge at Príncipe's Bom Bom resort, which connects the beach bungalows to a restaurant on a tiny island.  
OPPOSITE: Nossa Senhora da Conceição, a church in Santo António, on Príncipe.

HAD **CHARLES DARWIN** STOPPED  
HERE, PRÍNCIPE WOULD HAVE TOLD  
HIM **ALL HE NEEDED** TO KNOW TO  
DEVELOP HIS **THEORY OF EVOLUTION**



Perhaps I have. The haunted feeling comes and goes over the next few days, not only because of the evocative power of the forest, but also because of the country's history, which is symbolized by the old plantation houses. In one, I find the six-room Colonial House, part of the 15-room Roça Sundy. A tasteful conversion with Portuguese tiled floors and lazy fans whirring overhead, the building is a significant historic landmark. It was here, on May 29, 1919, that the English physicist Arthur Eddington proved Albert Einstein's theory of relativity by photographing a total eclipse of the sun. Flanking the hotel are the *senzalas*. A community still lives here: old men talk beneath the trees, children play in the alleys, multiple generations of women cook in small, charcoal-stained kitchens, their fish and vegetables piled in baskets at their feet.

The Príncipe regional government and UN-Habitat, the United Nations' agency for socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements, want these 136 families to voluntarily resettle in a newly built village, which would provide clean water, electricity, a functioning sewage system, a school, a health center and a market. They call it Promised Land. But not everyone wants to leave. The *senzalas*, however decrepit, are the homes they know. Wandering among these people, talking to them, is both moving and discomfiting. The paradise myth—so perfectly rendered on the rest of the island—is blown apart by the shoeless children, the purposeless men who aren't lucky enough to have a tourism job.

But does this make me like Príncipe any less? At first, it feels somehow wrong to come here on holiday, especially at a moment when we're grappling with the legacy of slavery more than ever. I can't quite work out if I should be encouraging people to visit this island, which tourism is already giving a better future, or withdrawing quietly, as if I haven't seen the ghosts. Then I meet a Cape Verdean schoolteacher and guide named Emmanuel Bettencourt, who has lived in Príncipe, Boston and Moscow. "The smell of slavery has nothing to do with how the people feel," he tells me. "It is how you interpret the symbolism. Slavery is not in the psyche of the people. It is in the psyche of you, the visitor."

Instead of closing the door on Príncipe's history, Shuttleworth, the government and other investors are saying to visitors: *Here, this is how it is—we are trying to do something to change it by bringing you here and energizing this economy, even if there are some formidable peaks to climb.* Day by day, I become more convinced. Like the Príncipean waiter, Gibson, I simply don't want to leave. When I finally do depart, I find myself admiring this authentic attempt to preserve a little piece of paradise without trying to pretend that paradise can be without flaw. +

## Visiting São Tomé and Príncipe

### GETTING THERE

There's no getting around it; flying to this two-island nation takes a while. It requires a day's travel and at least two stops—the second of which will likely be Accra, Ghana—to reach the capital city of São Tomé. Spend a day there before the half-hour flight to Príncipe.

### HOTELS

Mark Shuttleworth's development company, HBD Príncipe, owns four hotels on the islands. Bed down on São Tomé at

**Omali** ([omalilodge.com](http://omalilodge.com); doubles from US\$280) before continuing to Príncipe. Once there, choose from among **Bom Bom** ([bombomprincipe.com](http://bombomprincipe.com); bungalows from US\$460), a collection of 25 dwellings linked by a wooden walkway to the tiny, forested Bom Bom Island; **Roça Sundy** ([hotelrocasundy.com](http://hotelrocasundy.com); doubles from US\$245), in two historic plantation houses in the jungle interior; and the new **Sundy Praia** ([sundyprincipe.com](http://sundyprincipe.com); villas from US\$785), São Tomé and Príncipe's most luxurious property yet.



### TOUR OPERATOR

Alice Daunt at **Daunt Travel** ([daunt-travel.com](http://daunt-travel.com)) can organize a bespoke itinerary to São Tomé and Príncipe. She recommends combining a five-night stay with a wider West African itinerary. US\$5,250 per person for two people on an eight-night trip.—S.R.



# EARLY BIRD PROMOTION

*Come and experience the many wondrous facets of Cape Hotels.*



KOH SAMUI



KOH YAO NOI



© Chayanee Chomsaengchun

Cape Hotels are found around some of the most exclusive locations in Thailand. Seek out a secluded family resort with its own sandy cove backed by swaying palms and enjoy some refreshing snorkelling at Cape Panwa Hotel, Phuket. Cape Nidhra Hotel, Hua Hin, fronts onto one of the best long, sandy beaches in Thailand with direct access from the hotel's garden. Go out early as the Monks make their morning rounds and join the locals in the tradition of offering alms. A classic film by the pool at the hotel's Moonlight Cinema under the stars is a special experience. Cape Kudu Hotel on the island of Koh Yao Noi offers the chance of taking a long-tailed boat to watch the sunrise as you tuck into breakfast on a deserted beach then spend some time foraging for a variety of shellfish which will be prepared by the chefs for you to sample at the Hotel's Hornbill Restaurant in the evening. At the luxury private island resort of Cape Fahn Hotel, Koh Samui, experience the novelty of a table picnic by the sea with the waves lapping at your ankles. Practise the unique poses and moves of traditional Khon dancers or take a cruise on a luxury yacht from Cape Yacht Charters. All this is waiting just for you.

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wish you were here



## **Winding down the day on Amanwella Beach is best done simply by sitting back and watching the sun set. So we**

did just that, while the sky turned every natural shade possible. As the rest of us fell into that hush that accompanies the scenic end of the day in Tangalle on the south coast of Sri Lanka, two local guys energized the scene by dashing into the ocean at full speed. Tomorrow was a new start, but they still had some energy in reserve to make the most of this day. — LAURYN ISHAK





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# THE LUXE LIST 2020







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## Andaz Seoul Gangnam

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## Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono

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Hokkaido, Japan, 044-0082  
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## Park Hyatt Auckland

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# Spoiled for Choice

THESE DAYS, THE BEST HOTELS IN THE BUSINESS ARE ALL ABOUT UNDERSTATED LUXURY, REPRESENTING A SMOOTH-SAILING LIFESTYLE THAT ISN'T OVERLY FORMAL. THEY KNOW THAT ALL YOU REALLY WANT ON THE ROAD IS TO RELAX AS YOU WOULD AT HOME, JUST SOMEWHERE SHINIER, TASTIER, WITH SUBTLE, HITCH-FREE SERVICE, AND FOCUS ON YOUR NEEDS AND DESIRES. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THIS LEVEL OF LUXURY AROUND ASIA PACIFIC, THE PLACE TO TURN IS HYATT. SEVERAL NEW HOTELS IN HYATT'S UPPER ECHELON OF BRANDS ARE CHANGING THE FACES OF SOME OF THIS REGION'S MOST DYNAMIC DESTINATIONS, FROM AUCKLAND'S WATERFRONT TO THE SNOWY PEAKS OF NISEKO TO BOOMTOWN SHENZHEN. THERE'S ALSO NEWLY COOL JAKARTA, HARBOR-CITY HONG KONG, TRENDSETTING SEOUL AND TIMELESS KYOTO. READ ON TO SEE WHY IN EACH OF THESE SEVEN LOCALES YOU'LL FIND TASTE, CLASS, DESIGN AND INTUITION THAT ARE UNMATCHED BY OTHER HOTEL BRANDS, YET PERFECTLY ALIGNED WITH YOUR OWN.

WORLD OF HYATT  
WARMLY WELCOMES



TRAVEL+  
LEISURE

SOUTHEAST ASIA









# Hearts flutter in dynamic, shopping heaven Shenzhen

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Wake up to a  
spectacular  
Shenzhen skyline  
at Park Hyatt  
Shenzhen.

IN A STUNNING GLASS-AND-STEEL TOWER THAT MANAGES TO BOTH BEQUEATH KING-OF-THE-WORLD STATUS AND BLEND WELL WITH THE LOCAL CULTURE, PARK HYATT SHENZHEN OFFERS A NEW COZY ABODE TO MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME FOR A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS TRIP THAT IS CERTAIN TO BECOME LEISURE.







Swimming pool.

The Civic Center district.



## SEE+DO

The Futian district is a great place for a culture kick. **Shenzhen Museum** focuses on Cantonese and Hakka culture; the **Shenzhen Contemporary Art and Urban Planning Museum** is so neat aesthetically that it's a sight in its own right; also check out the **Shenzhen Science Museum** and the masterworks at **Yachang Art Gallery**. The area is also brimming with leafy parks and gardens, which look beautiful from above on the **Freisky Observation Deck** atop Ping'an Finance Tower.

## SHOP

Make a beeline for **Huaqiangbei Commercial Street**, the it destination for buying the latest electronics and any gadget your heart might desire. It's also got fashion, though to really fill up your wardrobe you might prefer **Coco Park**, where after browsing 200 stores you can reward yourself with drinks at its bustling bar street.

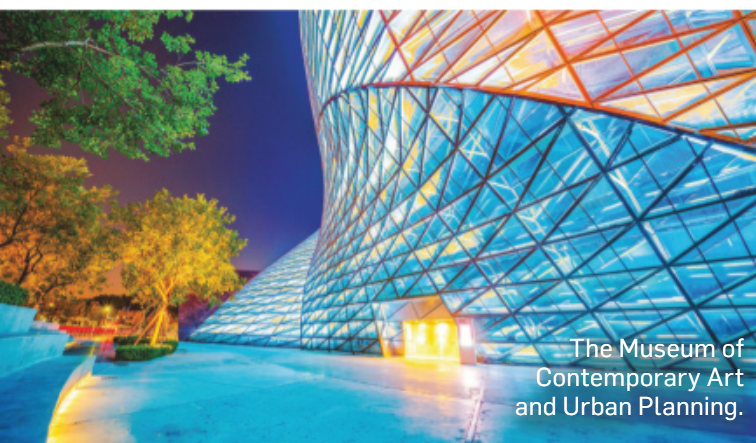
## EAT+DRINK

No one does intimately residential like Park Hyatt, and **Living Room** will make you feel right at home. Settle into the

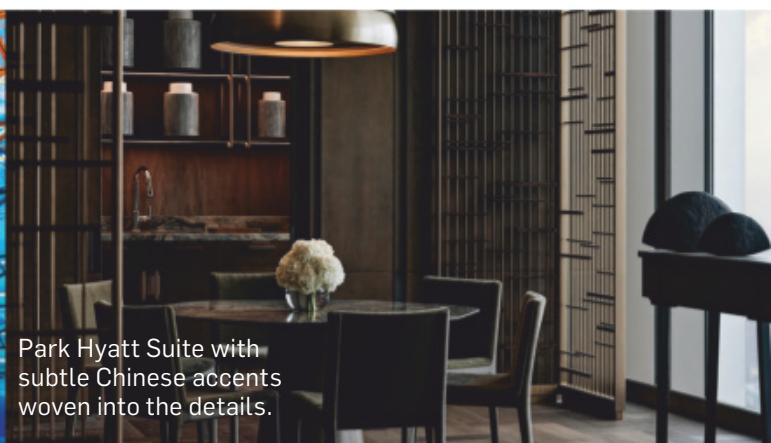
comfortable, light-filled room for tea, drinks or whatever meal fits your fancy. If it's Chinese you're after, **Garden Pavilion** takes you on a delicious tour of Cantonese, Sichuan and Jiangnan cuisine in an astonishing botanical setting that makes you feel like you're outdoors. Likewise the stunning, contemporary **The Glasshouse**—and after you've sampled their European fare, head for a nightcap upstairs at tip-top speakeasy **The Attic**.

## STAY

Fluttering up high in one of the world's most dynamic cities, the glass-and-steel butterfly that is **Park Hyatt Shenzhen** has risen with grace. Step into your room and be wowed by the great views out the vast windows. But there's also plenty to admire in the interiors from award-winning designers Yabu Pushelberg: modern Chinese accents provide elegant grounding in these cocoons that start at a generous 48 square metres and are stocked with bespoke toiletries from Le Labo. If you still need to stoke your sense of calm, do some laps in the indoor pool, or book an innovative wellness treatment at The Spa.



The Museum of Contemporary Art and Urban Planning.




Park Hyatt Suite with subtle Chinese accents woven into the details.





# Next-level Indonesian hospitality in marvellous melting-pot Jakarta



Ballroom at  
Park Hyatt  
Jakarta.

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THERE ARE FEW PLACES AS KINETIC AS THE INDONESIAN CAPITAL, WHERE LAYERS OF HISTORY MESH WITH THE CONTEMPORARY, AND MODERN DRINKING AND DINING VENUES ARE ELEVATING THE CITY'S GAME—AND THE MOST ELEVATED ADDRESS IN TOWN IS THE NEW PARK HYATT JAKARTA.







Soak in the sun on the rooftop pool.



Park Hyatt room with a spectacular view of Jakarta.

## SEE+DO

Jakarta is overflowing with history, as you'll see on a visit to **Kota Tua**, known as Batavia by the Dutch who used it as a port. Attractions include the canals and architecture, and four museums including **Jakarta History Museum**. The city is anchored in **Monas**, the arresting centre of Merdeka Square where the **National History Museum**, **Hall of Independence** and famed obelisk commemorate the struggle for Indonesian independence. Get some fresh air on a fab day-trip for the whole family to **Gunung Mas Tea Plantation**, which offers horseback riding, ATVing, and a pretty place for picnicking.

## SHOP

Back in 1990, **Plaza Indonesia** opened its doors to shopaholics, and the rest is retail history. Spread across four vast floors, this upscale mall is conveniently located in the CBD at the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout. Isn't it a quintessential shopper's delight to return to one's luxe hotel room, dozens of new bags and baubles in hand?

## EAT+DRINK

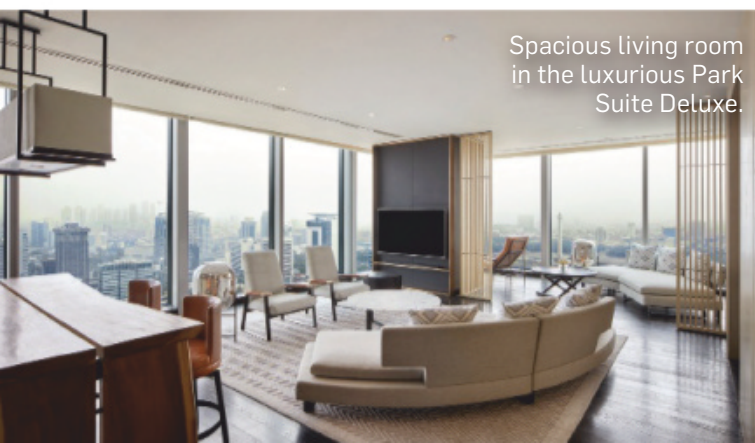
Let's start at the top: **KITA** 喜多

**RESTAURANT** seduces with its contemporary reinterpretation of Japanese teppan, shabu-shabu, sushi, sashimi, tempura and robata that is authentic but not stuffy-traditional.

**KITA Bar** is the city's hot roof bar, with indoor and outdoor spaces overlooking central Jakarta and the National Monument. Tuck into diverse Indonesian and Spanish cuisine at **Dining Room**, or sate your sweet tooth in **Conservatory**, where the live patisserie kitchen tempts. Just off the lobby, you'll find **The Bar** the best place to seal a deal, to the dulcet sounds of nightly live music.

## STAY

How do you like your views? **Park Hyatt Jakarta** says city-spanning from floor-to-ceiling windows, thank you very much. Guest rooms in this beauty queen start at a whopping 57 square metres, and they are all sumptuous spaces dotted with Indonesian touches and materials. The massive suites really make you feel at home—but better: the Diplomat Suite, for example, has a private gym and the Presidential Suite has its own VIP entrance for extra discretion. And don't forget the outdoor pool on high—it's a true urban resort.



Spacious living room in the luxurious Park Suite Deluxe.



Conservatory, a versatile hotel lobby lounge serving European café-style comfort food.



# Wonderland on top of the world in ski paradise Hokkaido

Enjoy authentic  
Cantonese and  
Sichuanese  
cuisines at Park  
Hyatt Niseko  
Hanazono.



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WITH THE FAMED 'NISEKO EXPRESS' REFRESHING PLENTIFUL POWDER DAILY, JAPAN'S WINTER CAPITAL IS ON EVERY DOWNHILLER'S LIST. PARK HYATT NISEKO BRINGS SERENE SOPHISTICATION, MICHELIN MENUS AND THEIR SIGNATURE SERVICE TO THIS RESORT TOWN—WHICH HAS PLENTY OF SUMMER DRAWS, TOO.





The perfect ski-in/  
ski-out convenience  
of Park Hyatt Niseko.



Every suite comes  
with a private  
onsen and a  
stunning view.

## DO

These are Asia's most iconic slopes, so grab your skis and snowboards from Park Hyatt Niseko's **ski valet**, and hit the trails—or book a **Weiss Cat** to truly own the mountain. **Snowmobiling** and **snowshoeing** offer other wintery fun. And come summer, this year-round mountain retreat turns emerald and you can dive into the outdoors by **biking, hiking, rafting**, playing the links on the famed **Hanzono Golf** course. Day-trips to **Otaru** and **Sapporo** also offer great culture.

## SEE

Cute, nearby Kutchan town has its share of off-piste diversions. Be sure to visit the **Shu Ogawara Art Museum**, dedicated to the work of the famed surrealist artist who was from here, and the **Kutchan Natural History Museum** next door. You'll also love **Somoza**, quintessentially Japanese woods-tucked complex made up of an art gallery, crafts shop, seminar space, tea room, chef's table and more.

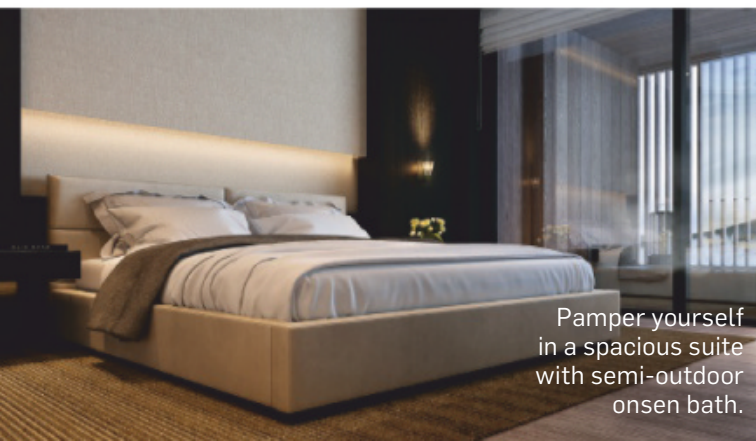
## EAT+DRINK

Baby, it's cold outside! No need to bundle up and out when Park Hyatt Niseko has so much goodness to warm

the belly. The showstoppers are **Moliere Montagne**, from Michelin three-starred chef Hiroshi Nakamichi, a champion of locavore fare cooked in the French method, and **Sushi Mitsukawa**, for the eponymous Michelin-starred chef's delectable fish from Kanazawa's Omicho market. Classics include **Teppan** or **Robata**; or country-hop to **China Kitchen** or Italian **Olivio**. The **Bar and Cigar Lounge** seduces with local gins and premium whiskies—so let's toast to a good day on the powder.

## STAY

Up in the Mount Annupuri ranges, a sense of place means a sense of peace, and the graceful **Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono** exudes that in spades. Ski in and out of this stunning resort designed by Melbourne's BAR Studio in a nouveau-Midcentury style, which nestles serenely in its natural surrounds. Take in the expansive views from the picture windows on all sides. All 100 guest rooms feature separate bedrooms and living areas, and the suites have private onsen baths for the holistic hotspring experience. Or head to the spa, because nothing beats a soak and a massage after a few great runs.



Pamper yourself  
in a spacious suite  
with semi-outdoor  
onsen bath.



Snowmobiling.





# A spirit-calming cultural immersion in spectacular Seoul

Experience the stunning designer rooms at Andaz Seoul Gangnam, where dynamic architectural angles play with traditional Korean patterns.



SOME PLACES JUST SCREAM "COOL", OTHERS DO IT WITH A CASUAL WHISPER. SEOUL, WITH ITS HISTORIC NOOKS AND ENVIABLE STYLE, IS THE RARE PLACE THAT DOES BOTH. ENSCONCE YOURSELF IN CHIC CITY LIVING THAT STAYS ROOTED IN THE CULTURE AT ANDAZ SEOUL GANGNAM.







Explore Rakkojae,  
Korean cultural  
centre.



Hyundai Card  
Travel Library  
—a must-visit  
even if you're  
not an avid  
reader.

## SEE + DO

Korean traditions are timeless and moving. Try a tea ceremony at the 130-year-old **Rakkojae** house in Bukchon village, or a Bojagi wrapping class with **HOHODANG**. Andaz Seoul Gangnam guests have complimentary access to the stunning **Hyundai Card Cooking and Travel Library**, and an exclusive invitation to a **SULWHASOO** make-up lesson. **Han River** is good for Chimac and a picnic, and watch out for K-pop stars on **Cheongdam-dong**!

## SHOP

Once we get going on shopping in Seoul, we could go on forever. Top picks: find the hottest local designers on **Apgujeong Rodeo Street** and all the international big names in bright lights on **Cheongdam-dong Fashion Street**. And you can't beat **Hyundai Department Store Apgujeong Main's** convenience, three minutes away.

## EAT+DRINK

One of the delights of Seoul is its enthralling food culture, with an infinite number of foods in the streets and alleys. The genius Andaz interpretation of that vibe is

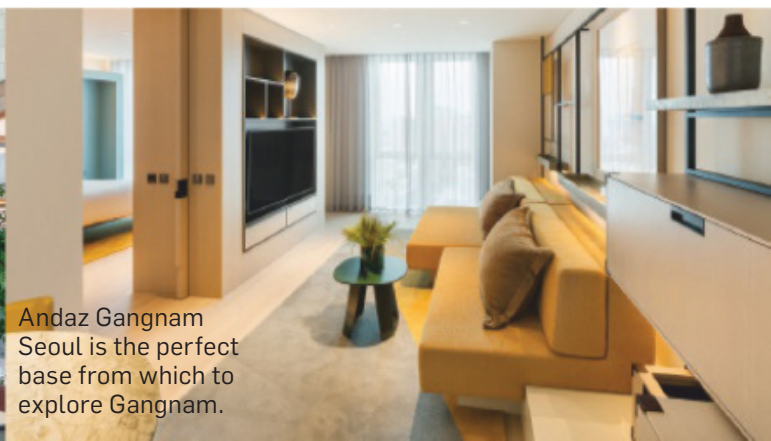
**JOGAKBO**, which means “traditional Korean patchwork,” and is a tapestry of all culinary cravings. Keep things light and easy at **Champagne & Chocolate, Bites & Wine** and the **Cocktail Bar**. For bigger appetites, dine on locally sourced, sustainable seafood and meats at **Middle House**, or take in a chef show at **South House**, where Asian-inspired dishes are whipped up in a marble kitchen. For an easy coffee or grab-n-go? Hit up **A'+Z**.

## STAY

When a hotel tells you its inspiration is gift-giving, you know it's got generosity of spirit in its soul. **Andaz Seoul Gangnam** is themed on Bojagi, the Korean wrapping cloth used in important ceremonies and to preserve luck in presents, and that sense of community and culture carries throughout the lovely, light-filled property. All art in the hotel was made by artists from Seoul or with deep roots in it, and the Bojagi motif carries from the architectural design through to the custom fragrance made to recall the scent of Wormwood in those traditional cloths. Such attention to detail—we're truly grateful.



Delicious re-interpretations  
of international dishes  
cooked in a charcoal oven at  
Jogakbo South House.



Andaz Gangnam  
Seoul is the perfect  
base from which to  
explore Gangnam.



# Cast off for holistic Kiwi hospitality in the City of Sails

AUCKLAND

Park Hyatt Auckland  
in Wynyard Quarter  
offers incredible  
unobstructed views  
of the Waitematā  
Harbour.



WONDERFUL, WALKABLE WAITEMATĀ HARBOUR BECKONS, AND NOW THERE'S A NEW WATERFRONT MANSE TO CALL "YOUR WHARENUI" FOR TRAVELLERS AND LOCALS ALIKE. THE UNDERSTATED LUXURY OF PARK HYATT AUCKLAND PRESENTS PERFECTLY IN LOW-KEY BUT AHEAD-OF-THE-CURVE NEW ZEALAND.





Wake up to stunning harbour views in a Park Hyatt suite with balcony.



The Sky Tower, minutes away from the hotel, is the go-to place for local activities.

## SEE+DO

If you haven't sailed Waitematā Harbour, you haven't visited Auckland. Book an outing for a sail on the city's iconic waters aboard an actual **America's Cup Yacht**. The **Sky Tower** isn't just your average tourist viewing deck; it's a city-center hub of activity offering everything from cafés to bungee jumping to aerial yoga. And as long as you're heading up in the clouds: a **scenic flight** on a helicopter or seaplane will give you a bird's-eye view of the city and its lush environs, with the unbeatable convenience (read: baller move) of taking off right from the harbour.

## SHOP

Auckland is eminently walkable, making shopping here a strolling, café-hopping joy. Iconic **Queen Street** and its cobblestoned laneways will meet your souvenir and luxe-label needs. Head to hip **Ponsonby Road** for local designers to help you stand out.

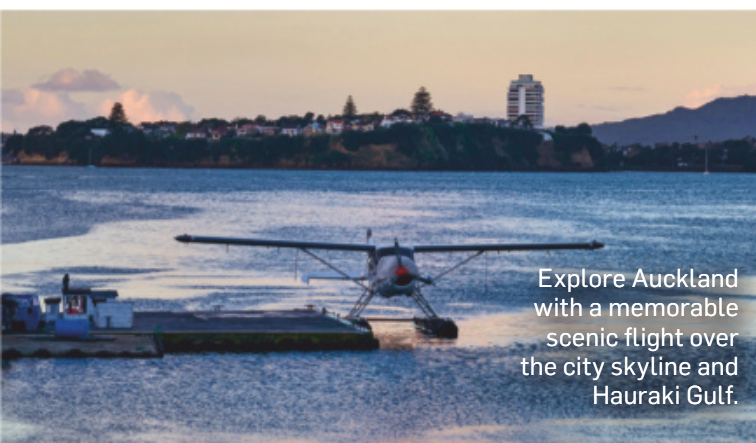
## EAT+DRINK

Multi-award-winning, globe-trotting chef Brent Martin returns home taking the reins of all the food at Park Hyatt

Auckland. **Onemata** is set to take centre stage of the foodie city's dining culture with its open kitchen showcasing the prep of sustainable dishes driven by the change in seasons and the fishermen's catch. Fresh fare is also ripe for the picking at the open-concept, water-view **The Living Room**. Care for a tippie... or a dram? **Captain's Bar** serves classic cocktails with that ever-important local twist.

## STAY

Take the beautiful essence of New Zealand's indigenous culture and mix it with international sophistication and intimate luxury: you get **Park Hyatt Auckland**, a seafront residence on Waitematā Harbour. The building is inspired by the Māori *wharenui* (house) and the exterior design is meant to evoke a Māori cloak—together, they welcome you into the beating heart of the country. You'll find native *totara pouwhenua* (carvings) and custom *tukutuku* panels and rugs made from New Zealand wool throughout the property, including in the spacious guest rooms, which start at 506 square feet. The feeling of community is palpable, the sense of place inherent.



Explore Auckland with a memorable scenic flight over the city skyline and Hauraki Gulf.



The Living Room invites travellers and passersby to enjoy delicious local produce alongside panoramic water views.





# A new and memorable view of dynamic Hong Kong



Soak in the sun on  
this amazing  
rooftop infinity pool  
at Hyatt Centric  
Victoria Harbour  
Hong Kong.

THIS ELECTRIC CITY—WITH ITS BELOVED MIX OF GOOD EATS, COMMERCE, HISTORY, CULTURE AND NATURE—HAS BEEN CENTRED ON THE SEA FOR CENTURIES. HYATT CENTRIC VICTORIA HARBOUR HONG KONG OFFERS AN EASY ACCESS, UPSCALE STAY WHERE THERE ARE SERIOUSLY NO BAD VIEWS.







Instagrammed hot spot, Yik Cheong Building.



Sip and drink under the stars at Cruise.

## SEE+DO

Bustling **Chun Yeung Street** is the place to go to time-travel into the Hong Kong of yore. Tram lines bisect this narrow market road filled with old tenement buildings and stalls selling all manner of food. If that quaintness isn't photogenic enough, keep those likes coming with a few snaps at the so-called **Monster Building**. One of Hong Kong's most Instagrammed spots is five connecting high-rises where the city's density overtakes you. Take in an enthralling Cantonese opera show at the landmark **Sunbeam Theatre**, founded by Shanghainese émigrés in 1972.

## SHOP

For out-of-the-ordinary souvenirs with a true local flavour, gifts that will bring back a flood of memories, and, indeed, unforgettable shopping experiences, visit **Wah Fung Chinese Goods Centre**, once Hong Kong's largest department store, where you'll be hard-pressed to hear any English but easily find unique buys. More modern shopaholics will be glad of the hotel's proximity to the gleaming, upscale **Harbour North** megamall.

## EAT+DRINK

Location, location, location! Hyatt Centric Victoria Harbour Hong Kong is adjacent to the North Point Ferry pier in a city whose soul is steeped in the maritime. What better name for a restaurant than **Cruise**? Here the sharing plates are inspired by ports of call across Asia, and you'll swoon for the panoramic water views. Meanwhile, in **The Farmhouse**, homemade farm-to-table fare provides comfort, and in **The Farmhouse Deli**, local street-food is deliciously reimaged.

## STAY

It would be pretty hard for a hotel to better live up to its name than **Hyatt Centric Victoria Harbour Hong Kong**, two towers that are together central to all things authentic to the city, energizing about a visit, and integral to smooth travel. All 665 of the modern, elegant guest rooms have insane harbour views—though if you really want to soak up your smart choice of staying here, head to the top-floor infinity pool. If you can tear yourself away from the social areas and eateries designed by star André Fu, a new waterfront promenade awaits.



Probably the best harbour view in the city.



Chun Yeung Street.





# A breath of fresh air amid centuries-old life in timeless Kyoto

Spectacular sunsets from the Park Hyatt Kyoto terrace.



DON'T GET US STARTED ON THE ZEN OF JAPAN'S ANCIENT CAPITAL: FROM THE TOWERING TREES TO THE HANDCRAFTED EVERYTHING, THE SENSE OF TRADITION HERE SLOWS THE HEART RATE. CULINARY-FOCUSED PARK HYATT KYOTO BRINGS A NEW RETREAT—AND SUNDRY FEASTS—FOR ALL THE SENSES.







A path to tranquility on the hotel grounds.



Awash in a sense of calm entering Park Hyatt Kyoto.

## SEE + DO

In a town full of UNESCO World Heritage sites, you've got eye-candy aplenty. Let's start with two famed temples: You're staying right next to garden-filled **Kodai-ji**, which dates to the 17th century, and in walking distance of **Kiyomizu-dera**, which is dedicated to the deity of mercy and compassion and more than 1,200 years old. Come evening, head to **Gion**, the city's famed geisha district and entertainment quarter. Here, **Minami-za**, Japan's oldest kabuki theater, from 1610, is a major highlight.

## SHOP

Must-strolls in Kyoto include the iconic **Ninenzaka** and **Sannenzaka**, beautifully restored historic alleyways filled with speciality merchants and sweet boutiques. In Gion, action-packed **Shijo-dori** is the place to get your retail therapy.

## EAT+DRINK

One-hundred forty-two years seems about long enough to build up a following. Just ask the family that has been running **KYOYAMATO**, the traditional kaiseki restaurant that

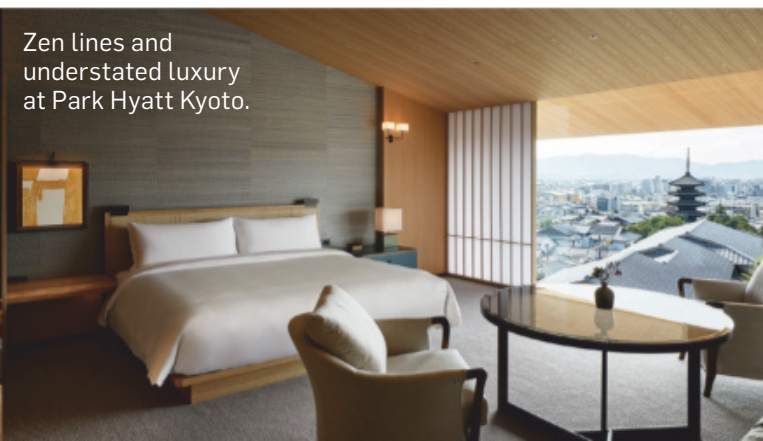
anchors this property, for seven generations. Before dinner, take in sunset from **Soyotei**, a storied teahouse from the Edo Era, where feudal warlords would secretly meet. **Yasaka** offers unpredictable teppanyaki with views of the pagoda for which it's named; homey **Kyoto Bistro** serves locally sourced Japanese comfort fare on handmade earthenware; and bring on the drama at **Kohaku**, the intimate bar that highlights Kyoto whisky, sake and gin.

## STAY

Are you ready to exhale? **Park Hyatt Kyoto** is a calming retreat tucked in the trees of the cultural capital's Higashiyama Hills. This luxury guesthouse—there are only 70 rooms including nine suites, after all, in a lovely collection of low-rise buildings with a central Japanese garden—inspires quiet reflection, a place where your senses are imbued with the seasonality of life. Throughout, you'll find fragrant tamo wood, original artwork, and the handiwork of local artisans, such as potters and printmakers, carrying on their craft as their forefathers have for generations.



The residential Living Room reception area.



Zen lines and understated luxury at Park Hyatt Kyoto.



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